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INDIAN ROUTE MARCH

by
LOUIS HAGEN

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To DIDO again,
for the same reasons only more so.



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FOREWORD

DRAFTED to India, I hated the idea. Years and miles away from home, one would arrive to be greeted with the slogan "Quit India." This country where the pukkah Sahibs drank chota pegs behind the closed doors of their exclusive clubs; outside the Indians and, of course, the B.O.Rs., (British Untouchables), and the misery and famine which made up the black chapter of British Imperial history.

India was about the only country in the world that I had no desire to visit. I knew too much about it and I did not like what I knew. I knew that we had selfishly exploited it for almost two hundred years and that our armies oppressed the people who nevertheless had had the guts to revolt again and again in an effort to throw off the yoke and build a free and united nation. Gandhi and Jinnah I knew as great leaders, worthy of the adoration of their people for whom they were striving to create a new progressive India, in the teeth of British opposition.

I had listened more or less patiently to those who argued that the Indian nation as such did not exist and that nationalism meant nothing to ninety-five per cent of these ignorant and backward religious fanatics who were far from ready for self-government. But two blacks don't make a white and no one had ever succeeded in convincing me. As we had ruled India for well over a hundred years, surely the present deplorable state of affairs was entirely our responsibility? If ninety-five per cent of the population was illiterate, why the hell hadn't we taught them to read and write? If they knew nothing of nationalism, unity and citizenship, why did we not help them to find out about it? If their fanaticism caused them to fight over their religious problems, why did we not convert them to Christianity?



FOREWORD

There just did not seem to be any valid excuse that I could see. The country was in an incredible mess ; during all these years we had achieved absolutely nothing—on the credit side. I did not want to be held responsible. I did not want to fight for something rotten. I felt I should have to be ashamed of being British.

That was the way I felt when I got out of the luxurious Sunderland flying boat at Karachi, and I think my outlook was pretty typical of the average thinking soldier. But the more one saw and experienced, the more one changed and rechanged one's opinions ; the harder it became to draw any sort of conclusion. During my fourteen months in India, I noticed myself—in common with almost everyone I met who came out there and kept his eyes open—becoming less and less didactic as my knowledge increased. What many of us saw, and why we changed our minds so often is what I have tried to set down here ; that and our ordinary life, which in many ways was so extraordinary and paradoxical that I feel it is worth while writing about it just as it happened. The reader will therefore find this book contradictory, full of theories that lead nowhere in particular and quite devoid of solutions. Any sort of verdict is out of the question for the first-year student ; all he can do is to keep his eyes glued to the broader issues and hope for the best. His curriculum is bewildering enough as it is—bewildering but entirely fascinating.



I

TRAVEL

THERE can be no greater contrast than to step from a Sunderland flying boat on to an Indian train. We had taken barely three days to travel from Poole harbour to Karachi in a rarefied VIP atmosphere, lounging on easy chairs, strolling to the larder and ice box for refreshments, playing cards and chess and idly watching the meaningless pattern of the world slip away beneath us.

From this to the Indian railway station. . . . The normal number of travellers approximates to those at Paddington on a Bank Holiday. How many of these Indians ever intend to or actually do travel is difficult to say; they are just there. They squat, they lie, they scrabble, they crawl, they are on every inch of a platform already covered with refuse, spit and excrement. Among the people, bald, sore-covered pie dogs sniff and scavenge. The surrounding atmosphere is hot and foetid as if one were in an airless room. A loud buzzing rises from the crowd punctuated by the wailing of babies, the sharp yelping of the dogs when they are kicked, the shouting of the coolies and the excited voices of people quarrelling and abusing each other. Dotted about the station are mysterious bundles of white sacking; luggage, one would assume, until one notices a pair of tiny eye holes about two feet off the ground. These bundles don't seem to belong to anybody and nobody takes any notice of them, least of all their Mohammedan husbands who dump them there in the blistering sun and forget all about them, our first encounter with Mother India in the flesh or rather in the bag.



Whole families remain here for days together, waiting for a train that might be able to take them. They just spread a rug in the dust and settle down to cook, eat and sleep. Sometimes they come here because there is a roof to shelter them from the sun or rain. Many of them are engaged in the national profession of begging, which has it's H.Q., on railway stations. Often a family will own one of the many fly-blown portable food stalls. But why the bulk of the people are there is a complete mystery. Gangs of wild children are always to be found on railway platforms; they are naked or dressed in filthy rags, and their long lice-infested hair hangs over their shoulders. When you spill some food or drop something on the ground, they beat the pie dogs to it every time.

Most of the professional beggars are women; women who invariably carry a baby in their arms. They follow you wherever you go, "Backsheesh, Sahib," "Rajah Sahib," plucking at you with their greasy claw-like hands until you are ready to vomit. In the front rank of the begging profession are to be found the crippled, the blind and the syphilitics; they are led, wheeled or carried by their promoters. One looks out of the train to see something being carried level with the window in a small basket. The something consists of a tiny withered body, about the size of a two-year-old child's, on top of which is the grey, oversized head of an old woman. If the window of the compartment is open, the basket is pushed into it and in a half witted and cracked voice the head begins mechanically repeating "Backsheesh, Sahib, Backsheesh, Sahib." Then there are the legless and armless cripples who are mounted on little carts and wheeled up and down the platform. . . . backsheesh! backsheesh! backsheesh. . . .

The first time you see this sort of thing, it leaves you stunned. Although it was happening in front of our eyes and under our noses, one just couldn't take it in unless one



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use one's imagination. The utter degradation of these human beings was almost too exaggerated; it had a fantastic quality like the madhouse scene in "Peer Gynt." To some of the chaps it never did become any more real than a play; they just lacked the imagination to accept it. To start with, I was overcome with an inarticulate pity that soon turned to the awful realisation of my own inability to do anything. It was all too much. Then, as I saw the same thing on station after station, my pity changed to irritation and then into something very near hatred. I hardly noticed the change at first, except that I started turning away to avoid seeing. Then I found myself actually pushing those dirty bodies away quite roughly, when they came near me or touched my clothes. I was horrified to find myself shouting and losing my temper. I knew perfectly well I was wrong and that these creatures were no more responsible for their actions than animals, but what I could not stomach was the way they exploited and gloated over their misery. That, and the feeling that we were being blackmailed against our will. I was ashamed of my irritability, and did my best to suppress it, and I know the others did too, but of course the feeling should never have been there at all and it was.

The train was over two hours late when it finally pulled into the station. The Indians now became quite frenzied. They stampeded towards their carriages, elbowing each other and kicking anything aside that happened to be in their way. The carriages were full almost at once, but more and more people pushed and shoved their way in, until there were layers and layers of humanity piled up to the roof. Some passengers still went on climbing in through the windows; they had to be levered into place by a crowd of friends and relations who seemed to have come to the station specially for this purpose. When the train eventually started, after a great deal of whistling and flag waving,



there were arms, feet and whole bodies still hanging out of the windows and doors.

We had our own reserved compartments ; the height of luxury compared with those wretched Indians. But to us who were going to have to spend five days and nights in these stinking wooden-benched railway carriages, comparisons weren't much comfort. Besides the general heat and overcrowding, the place was alive with mosquitoes and we were soon overrun by formations of dark red cockroaches which appeared from underneath the benches and latrine. Ants got busy and found their way into our luggage and all sorts of unidentifiable insects buzzed round us day and night. We had no wash place and the latrine which stank was just a hole in the floor. We felt grimier and nastier than we ever had before. It is impossible to feel like this in Europe ; not even after days of fighting in the mud. Mud is mud and can be washed off. Here we felt as if our bodies were impregnated with filth and disease. We were beyond feeling dirty, we felt unclean.

As the days went by, we got more and more tired and depressed ; as much as anything from lack of sleep. During the day the heat made sleep impossible and at night the mosquitoes kept us awake. If we did manage to drop off, ten to one the train would stop at a station or a siding, and crowds of Indians would immediately seize the opportunity to start begging or trying to sell us char or fruit. If they got no response, they just went on clamouring and banging at the shutters, trying to force their grubby hands and faces into the compartment. Then we would lose our tempers. And if the sleeper had not already been woken by the Indians, the cursing of his own mates was enough to wake him from the dead.

Three times a day we stopped for food. Rations and tea were distributed among the B.O.Rs., while the officers went for their meals to the station refreshment room.



Children and beggars lined the train on both sides and fought over every scrap we threw out of the window. They gobbled up everything and anything. As to that myth about Hindus not eating meat or fish, at least eighty per cent of them will do so if they get the chance. Only Brahmins and a few orthodox Hindus are strict vegetarians. During famines, Europeans and Indians who are rich enough, can and do buy food in unlimited quantities. They invariably try to justify themselves by saying that none of those who are starving would touch any of the things they eat. One has only to be in India a few days to discover the blatant hypocrisy of this argument.

The first-class sleeping cars in which the officers and wealthier Indians travelled were very comfortable and were fitted with baths, fans, and sometimes refrigerated compartments. As the journey went on, the officers from our draft devised a scheme to better our lot. They unpacked their spare tunics, and whenever a passenger got out of their compartment, a newly promoted officer promptly got in. This made our own carriages much less crowded apart from the actual joy when one's turn came to take a temporary commission and have a wash and a refreshing nap under the fan.

Apart from the seething activity on the railway stations there was very little to see on this journey. The country through which we travelled is over two thousand miles of yellow-brown monotony. The waste land is like the back of a scraggy pie dog; here and there is a little grass and an odd isolated bush, but the general effect is one of baldness. The cattle are bony from undernourishment. The huts and hovels are uniformly thatched and made of mud. The naked children, lean men and women covered with rags are always there, whether one looks out of the window every five minutes or every five hours.

How remarkably alike all the Indians are! Travel thou-



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hundreds of miles ; cross and recross India ; you will find that they still wear the same dhoti and the same sari, and their skin is always the same varying shades of brown. Even in Mohammedan districts there is the same dreary starved uniformity. I could not understand how people could have argued about the immense differences in the Indians. Every hundred miles in Europe, in England even, you see different types of people, breeds of cattle, local architecture and characteristics. But here, it seemed to me, was a country which was more completely one unit than I had ever imagined possible. This was in itself a new slant on the Indian Question. That journey, the first of many, was an eye-opener ; from that time on I got my first conception of India all in one piece.



INDIAN VILLAGE

I NEVER got tired of exploring the village near our camp. It made me feel as if I had stepped back a thousand years. This was how I had imagined a primitive village in my early history lessons. Even at that age I had been convinced that modern life is a good deal more pleasant for the majority of people, and here my worst suspicions about my forefathers became exaggerated reality. The squalor and ignorance horrified and fascinated me at the same time.

Built along the main road, the village stretched for about a mile. Most of the dwellings on both sides of the busy, dusty thoroughfare were red-brown mud huts with straw or faultily tiled roofs and shapeless walls plastered with patches of cow dung which bore the imprint of the hand that stuck them there. Apart from plastering their walls with it, the natives dry this cow dung and use it for fuel. Here and there, one noticed an odd, dilapidated brick hut and a very few simple white-washed bungalows which were the police station and post office or belonged to the few more prosperous inhabitants. The road was always crowded till late at night, for these villages have enormous populations, they are really small towns but for their pitiful buildings.

It is quite inconceivable how these masses of people all manage to fit into the huts at night. Amongst the throngs on the road, bullock-carts advance slowly and unwillingly, their drivers trying—apparently without success—to control them with shouts and curses. Cows, goats, big black water-buffaloes, dogs and children of all ages, covered with dust



and dirt, worm their way in and out of the crowd. Most of the huts have roofs that overhang the street and underneath them the bazaars are arranged. There are lots of shops with fried and baked wares in neat stacks, and an amazing variety of vegetarian and oily foods. Then there are the bazaars that specialise in nuts; these are all colours and shapes; in the shell, peeled, mixed and baked in some sugary substance. Food seems to be being cooked everywhere. There are cobblers with their work outside their huts, tobacconists manufacturing their own brand of native cigarettes, rows of sewing machines being worked by tailors—oblivious of the hub-bub around them—and bazaars selling silks and cloth and fruit and vegetables, while the native vendors squat on the dusty ground. . . . There is barging, carrying, jostling and aimless movement everywhere, without any plan or sign of order.

Casually wandering through the streets, you get the impression of feverish activity. But if you look more carefully, you will realise that this impression is only created by the multitude of people who live in such a confined space. In reality the individual villager is the personification of inactivity. He pulls his bed in front of his hut and lolls there; he slouches a few yards along the road to buy some cigarettes; he squats in the dust, chews betel, spits and chews more betel; he sits on his bullock cart and dozes away. Groups of villagers squat round a big water and charcoal pipe, which we call Hubble Bubble, slowly passing the long mouthpiece from one to the other and sucking appreciatively; others play cards or just squat and talk. Everywhere the men are squatting or lying, leaning or resting. The men who work are in the minority, but the women and the animals make up for it.

You will never see one of these undersized and careworn women inactive. They carry the water from the wells in large shiny brass bowls balanced on their heads. They



stacked under huge bundles of grass and weeds to feed the cattle. All the heavy building work is done by them; they shift boulders and carry clay and bricks. Road repairs is another of their privileges. The younger ones are almost always pregnant, with the last baby carried sideways on their hips. In the early morning and after the day's work they have to cook, milk the cows, gather firewood and minister to the wants of their godlike husbands. They will toil, have children and be slaves to the end of their lives.

The ordinary Indian woman has no social activities; all that is reserved for the men. In the evening when the men sit round the meagre fire and talk, you will never see the women. Nor will you see them at the cinemas or in the teashops in the towns. All social gatherings, apart from some religious festivals, are reserved exclusively for the men. How Indians can talk about the sanctity of family life and the beauty which lies in the selfless love and devotion of their wives, is beyond me. But this is the argument they invariably use to justify their outlook towards women. There can only be physical intimacy between these people; their mental lives are poles apart. They scarcely exchange a word unless the man has some specific orders to give. Their whole relationship is symbolised by the women walking humbly behind their men.

Just behind the mud huts along the road a patchwork of fields begins. Fields the size of allotments which surround any big English town. Each one of them is carefully separated by a mud bank, for each one has a different owner. Ploughing is done with the help of an undersized and skinny ox that is barely able to drag the wooden plough. The plough just scratches the surface of the tired soil in the same way it has scratched for centuries. No fertiliser is used, crop rotation has never been heard of, tractors, sowing machines and harvesters simply don't exist for these farmers. No wonder an acre's yield is less than one tenth of ours, no wonder it



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Replaces twelve holy Indian cows to produce the same quantity of milk as one ordinary Shorthorn. When you see the farmer lift his plough on to his shoulders and carry it for two miles to his other field you know why India is starving.



III

SOLDIER'S EVENING OUT

THE excitement of travelling, new people and places had left me. We had settled down now and one day was like another. It was not a strenuous life; there was no real hardship and we were quite comfortable. If our treatment back in England had been no worse than this, we would have been quite satisfied and perfectly happy. There was no guardroom, no fence around the camp and within reason we were free to do what we liked from morning till night. Yet there was always an atmosphere of confinement. The time after tea was the most trying; at about five o'clock, when the work of the day was over, you got restless and the mind and body cried out for recreation. You found yourself longing for a complete change of atmosphere and surroundings, for female company, for your family, and friends. You felt the urge to dress up, to get ready, to go off, to lead your own life, to be yourself, to do something quite different from the daily routine. You couldn't help remembering the same time just after tea in England, when you got up from the table still chewing, raced to the wash-house, put on your best battle-dress while your mind was running ahead. You were visualising your girl friend waiting, or a dance, or a cinema, or a telephone call home; you hurried along, fully preoccupied with the next few hours; the past, the future, the army and its routine were all forgotten. You passed the guardroom and you were free. . . . But there was no guardroom to pass here; just fields and woods and space all round you. There was no girl waiting for you either; all that was thousands of



ness away. There was nothing, nothing at all; you felt helplessly lost and very sad.

But tonight was different. There was something to look forward to for once. We were going to have an adventure, at least we were going to try. This feeling in itself was so cheering and exhilarating, that even the business of shaving and dressing became a conscious pleasure.

We had decided to visit the village near our camp. It was supposed to be out of bounds after dark and we had been told it would be dangerous for us to go there at the moment, owing to the atmosphere created by the imprisonment of several congressmen. Of course, in our present state of boredom, this was an added spice; the element of risk and possible danger was just what we needed. And there was another reason for our excitement at the prospect of our evening out; no one had actually mentioned it, but we had all noticed several times in passing through the village, that there were a few huts where the girls had smiled at us. These girls had been dressed in brightly coloured silks, they had looked well fed and had a gentle freshness about them that made you return their friendly greeting and hope for more. They were quite different from the other tired-looking village women, who cover their faces whenever you look at them and who do all the heavy manual work, like road repairs, hauling and carrying while their men folk are content with the lighter and more skilled occupations. Each one of us was silently hoping that those other dark, smiling girls would provide part of our evening's entertainment.

When we were all dressed up, we were so smart we could have walked into the Governor's residence without feeling self-conscious. The four of us sat in our hut and waited for the sun to set. Whisky was passed round, cigars were lit and we inspected our revolvers. We began to warm up and speak of the thing that was uppermost in our minds.



When we had started, we could talk of nothing else. We had been away from home for about six weeks ; a long time to be without and not long enough to be used to it. Of course, what we were contemplating was against all the rules and regulations out here, but that didn't worry us. As far as we were concerned, it was against all the rules and regulations of nature to keep us in this kind of isolation. By the time the whisky had gone round a third time, we had become thoroughly animated and pretty determined. Quite apart from anything else, one couldn't very well leave India without having sampled everything. How could one face one's friends at home if one couldn't enlighten them on the subject of "Love in the Orient"? Armed with our guns and necessary safety equipment, we set forth.

We crossed some rough fields and reached the canal bank ; this we knew led straight into the village without touching the road leading to our camp. It was pitch dark but by no means quiet, for the jackals and hyænas were just tuning up for their nightly concert. The sounds of our camp grew fainter and the noises of the village became audible.

The slow whining of native music, the dull rhythm of drums, the calling and mumbling of native voices and the smell of human excrement that surrounds every Indian village, made us slow down. It was all so foreign and unreal apart from being rather sordid, when one remembered England and home. But then we weren't at home or in England now, and we couldn't possibly just turn round and go back to our dreary camp ;—that would be plain cowardice. Although our spirits were rather damped, no one said anything and we went on into the village.

The road was patchily lit by the oil lamps burning in each of the bazaars. There were still the same crowds one always noticed, wandering aimlessly about in the daytime,



fewer ox-carts. In front of some of the huts, the natives, wrapped in their white sheets and coloured blankets, were squatting on the ground smoking their large water pipes and sipping the local hooch. They get this stuff out of the palms; you can see a little container on most of the trees collecting the liquid at the top of the stem. Lamps were burning inside the huts as well, and as there are just entrances without doors, we could see the natives inside. They don't have any furniture at all—not even beds—just a few odd boxes and a straw mat on which they sit quietly smoking. When we looked in, they looked back at us but not aggressively.

We strolled on examining the bazaars. And then, through the entrance of a white-washed hut, we saw two of the dark beauties we were looking for. We hesitated. . . . It felt rather like standing on a diving board higher than you ever had before and not knowing the depth of the water below. But having got this far, there was no going back and the girls smiled so sweetly that the final plunge was quite easy. We went towards them.

They were barefooted and dressed in transparent white material that hung loosely round their well-shaped bodies. They were on the plump side, about a head shorter than we were and they must have been about seventeen. When they smiled their eyes and teeth shone in the lamplight. Gently, they drew us into the hut. We looked at each other, pleased and rather surprised; it had all been so much easier than we expected.

We talked and laughed with the girls, neither understanding a word of the other's language; but we knew we were all thinking about the same thing. Then one of them called, and a boy of about twelve came in. I imagine he must have been a pupil at the village school because he was clean, well dressed and spoke English. "Jig a Jig, Sahib?" and holding up one hand he added: "Five



rupees. We said : " Jig a Jig five rupees, all four of us ? " He laughed and told his sisters and they laughed too. Then he said very seriously : " Jig a Jig five rupees *each* Sahib." We said : " Three rupees each Sahib and you're a loose-wallah." We paid him three rupees each and that was that. Then we settled up among ourselves ; we were very polite about it and it was rather complicated. Our big problem was who was to have which girl first, second, third and last ; we began spinning coins, trying to work it out like gentlemen. We spun coin after coin and the combinations that resulted only added to our difficulties. At one moment I had won both girls for the first round and one of them for the third and fourth as well : I don't know how we should have managed if the clever little schoolboy brother hadn't suddenly produced two more smiling beauties who knew what it was all about. Each girl then took one of us gently by the hand and led us away.

Hand in hand, my girl and I crossed a dark courtyard, sinking deep into the mud in several places and bumping into a cow here and there. We came into a very small room like the one we had left ; just a cubicle with white-washed walls, no windows, no furniture and a straw mat on the floor. An old tin filled with oil, a wick showing above its rim, gave a faint, flickering light. Looking at the queer, dark young creature in this dim, empty little room, it suddenly came over me just how far away from England I really was. Then I forced myself to forget about England. . . .

When we all met again in one of the rooms, the girls gave us a drink of their local fire water and after a lot of laughter and jabbering, we parted the best of friends.

Back in our camp, with a nightcap in our hands, we sat on our beds comparing notes. We were absurdly proud and pleased with ourselves ; it was the same exhilarated feeling one had had last summer after a successful patrol. It was another experience.



MEMSAHIB AT HOME

AFTER several weeks we had our first encounter with the British natives of India ; those legendary pukkah Sahibs and their even more pukkah Memsahibs. A hundred of us were sent over dusty, bumpy roads almost a hundred miles to attend a B.O.Rs.' dance and supper at the Governor's residence. The ride was a nightmare. We were covered in dust and our bones ached, but as soon as we had passed the smartly saluting guard at the gate and had our first glimpse of Government House, we felt it was worth it. Coming from our primitive huts on the Station, this world of green lawns, flower beds and palatial buildings looked like an exaggerated stage set. In fact, the whole evening was highly theatrical.

The trucks slowly rounded the large flower-bordered carriage sweep in front of the residence. Fountains were playing and immense trees shaded the gravel paths that led through the peaceful park. The whole set-up seemed incredible, remembering the parched, yellow country through which we had just ploughed our way. We drew up under a large portico and went up the wide steps into the entrance hall. The rooms were colossal and looked even bigger than they were, as they were painted white and very simply furnished. The floors were covered with bright Indian carpets, and the barefooted Indian servants in their red liveries looked amazingly beautiful in this setting.

Slightly dazed, we entered the cloak-rooms. We came to with a bump when we looked at ourselves. We were black and so were the towels after a few minutes.



We were escorted to the enormous ballroom where the Governor and her Ladyship received us, both of them were resplendent in evening dress. Around the dance floor sat the girls, dressed up to kill. They had assembled into several groups, apparently determined by the shades of their skin. The smallest group was the whitest; only five of them, and they were the star turn of the whole show. None of us had seen a white woman since we arrived at the camp; some just stood and gaped, but about twenty of the more forward ones, myself included, made a beeline for the five bright shiners and from then on it was every man for himself and no holds barred.

I found myself reduced to shooting the most terrible line; within five minutes competition had forced me to wave my medal about and say that I had written a book. This got shamefully satisfactory results. A group of us who were considered sufficiently "all right" found that from now on we had nothing to worry about socially, as apparently we came up to scratch, and so found ourselves officially dubbed "educated B.O.R.s" As a reward, we were led up and shown off to the Governor's party. Whenever we were introduced to a member of the smart set we found that we each had a label. "Sgt. Hagen, M.M., famous author" (that was O.K. by me), "F.-Sgt. Lestrangle, journalist" (Tony was nineteen and had once had something published in *Answers*), "W.O. Slade, D.F.C., Battle of Britain Spitfire Pilot" (that's how he got his twitch) and lastly "S.-Sgt. Mapstead, Durham University" (sic). We knew how to play the game now and rather enjoyed it in an awful way, but the Memsaahibs took their snobbery deadly seriously. I found if I asked about some particularly attractive girl, I would be told, "Oh, she's country," meaning mixed blood, or "She's married to an Indian," or "Her father works on the railway" in a voice of withering scorn. If my curiosity was aroused by a lady whose breeding was



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beyond reproach, then my partner found it worth while to relate her whole history. Before the evening was over I knew the private lives of all the girls who "mattered." It seemed that they had nothing else to do but sleep with each other's husbands, with an odd lover thrown in now and again just to complicate matters. At least, that was what they told me about each other; in reality their lives were a good deal tamer than they would have one believe. After all, they had to do something because they were oh, so bored. They all had at least ten servants, cars, ayahs and husbands who had to work damned hard. It seemed they knew nothing of what women back at home were doing. Their idea of war service was to roll bandages over a nice cup of tea out on the lawn, to dance with "Our Boys" once a week, and to walk through the hospitals for an hour every few days and say a few words to the B.O.R.s, who were then supposed to recover immediately.

Their life was a well-ordered round of lounging in their beautiful homes under cooling fans and meeting in their clubs to talk scandal—what else *could* one talk?—over drinks, always with a delicious feeling of superiority to the Indians and Anglo-Indians. These wives of a Master Race were manifestly a good deal more deadly than the males of the species. However, they were women and they were white and we had come to the Governor's beano with the firm intention of cadging invitations, if it was humanly possible. So when one of my high and mighty partners seemed kindly disposed towards me, I ventured to suggest a date.

She promptly invited me to lunch. My first visit to her large white house was more or less formal, but my hostess made it quite clear that from then on she would be at home on, should we say Wednesdays? if I cared to call. I did care.

I discovered that three hours spent with Felicity would



involve twenty-four hours of the most excruciating travel. The first thing I had to do was to wangle myself on to the messing committee as a buyer of fresh food. This meant I left the camp early on Wednesday mornings, reaching the market town several hours later. I was filthy and worn out before I got out of the gharry. My marketing done, I wandered about filling in time in the dirt and dust with the day getting steadily hotter until two o'clock when I could ring up my Mem sahib. "Yes, you can take a tonga and come now, he's just leaving for the office." That was the shameless answer I had been waiting for. At about ten past two I arrived, and was let in by one of the uniformed boys.

She was waiting for me in her refrigerated boudoir reserved for very special visitors. Outside it was a hundred and ten in the shade and the brilliant light hurt the eyes; in here the temperature was kept at under seventy-five and the blinds were drawn. It was a small room; a large couch upholstered in pink chintz covered most of the floor space. Besides the couch there was a small easy chair and a large cocktail cabinet. That was all. A door led into a little bathroom and the bathroom led into the garden. That was useful.

Felicity, draped on the sofa, pretended to read my book. "Darling, you *are* a brave boy, aren't you?" I knew I was, but then that climate gives you ideas. "Do you think you'll write a book about India. If you do, will you put me in it?" I said I thought on the whole I would. She gave me a long ice-cooled gin—I never got any whisky there; I found that was the only concession she made to her husband. The whisky was his. She settled me in the chair and then began to talk.

She was a little difficult to follow, not only because she never remained on one subject for two consecutive sentences, but also because everything she said was such utter un-



regigated nonsense. I felt so wonderful, sipping my long drink and inhaling the clean cool air, that I hardly listened, but I gathered that these crass statements, catty criticisms and reactionary pronouncements were designed to impress me. . . . What impressed me was that long lithe body and that very pale skin.

Before long, she was well away on her favourite topic: "the things I do for the 'Boys'" and their pathetic gratitude (I heard this one every time I went there). Then she broke off, sighed and announced what a bore it was that the third car was laid up again. As if that wasn't enough, her husband had to go to Calcutta for a few days and was being a bore about taking her two best boys to look after him on the trip. Perhaps the worst bore of all was the Governor's A.D.C.; he was so much in love with her. But really she couldn't be angry with him; he was such a sweet boy, straight from the varsity and such a good family and so rich. It was also very embarrassing the way the Governor confided in her. The other women were all talking about it and were terribly jealous. . . . And so on and so on. . . . I was becoming tipsily tolerant of her chatter; it was a small price to pay for feeling so cool and civilised.

By gradual degrees, her conversation became more and more personal. It was the kind of talk, punctuated with tiny giggles, I had heard so often at small town dances. Everything she said, however ordinary, was given some kind of twist or innuendo, and every feeble answer I gave was interpreted by her in the same way. She did not talk much during the last hour of my call; I used the only way to stop her. At five o'clock her husband rang up to say he was coming home. I had to go, and pay for my sins.

Coming out into the dry heat was like walking slap into a furnace. I could hardly breathe and the sun blinded me. I walked down the wide road and, looking back for the last time, I saw her husband's big Humber turn into the



gates. I walked until I came to a railway crossing and waited for a slow goods train which was due to pass around six o'clock. I jumped the brake wagon and got a lift to the goods yard of the town. Here I changed to a locomotive which took me another twenty miles of my return journey to a place where the cinema, owned by some Anglo-Indians employed on the railway, was patronised by the nearby R.A.F. Gharries from their drome came to this cinema every night, and after the show I got a lift back there. I spent the rest of the night on this station and at five a.m. next morning hitchhiked back to our camp on the mail plane.

Looking back, it seems almost incredible to me that those three hours of doubtful pleasure with Felicity were worth twenty-four of extraordinary discomfort, but they were. To have something to relieve the deadly monotony, something to look forward to, something to think about for three days in the week—the day before, the day and the day after—made me the luckiest B.O.R. on the station, and I knew it. So did everybody else. They all knew about Felicity, and were good-naturedly envious of my Wednesdays in the refrigerated boudoir. I was reminded of the story about the cadet at St. Cyr chosen by his regiment to spend the night with the reigning cocotte of the time. He also had benevolent comrades and a co-operative C.O. Of course, mine didn't pay my fare—he just winked when I was A.W.O.L.

Felicity was certainly the counterpart of the reigning cocotte in the story, for she was pretty well the only accessible white woman within a radius of two hundred miles. In spite of her egotism, her vanity, her lust for admiration and attention and the coldness which showed itself in the way she treated her husband and her servants, and although her Memsahib's hypocrisy would never allow her to admit it, give her her due, she did at least do one very definite thing for "The Boys."



MAIL

INDIANS, Sahibs and Memsahibs seemed entirely unreal ; even our own men seemed strange in these surroundings. Mail from home represented reality and made one remember that our world was still waiting for us. The more we were isolated and the longer we stayed away, the more we needed these letters. They became an obsession ; we could not live without them. The feeling of despair, almost panic, that came over you when mail was delayed, could not be dispelled by common-sense or any amount of rationalising. I have never been able to make out how much of this pre-occupation was generated within oneself and how much of it was contagious and came from a mass craving for love, reassurance and normality. We needed these desperately ; more and more all the time, but we were thousands of miles and months away from them. Mail was our spiritual and emotional supply of calories, and we had to have it. It is as hard now to recapture the state of mind that this craving ; induced as it is to remember accurately the sensations of a painful illness, but that it was the most important aspect of our lives at the time, there is absolutely no doubt at all.

Those chatty, loving scribbles from home, assumed a beauty and significance that turned the heart over. Admonitions, small, personal grumbles and trivial bits of news, opened the door for a moment into an infinitely precious private world ; intimate, cosy, secure. Mail meant happiness ; nothing out there affected us in the same way. An interminable, empty day of restless boredom, with the threat of others exactly like it stretching away into the



future, could suddenly be made exciting. You became animated and optimistic, you were able to concentrate again, you perked up and looked round and began to enjoy little everyday things that you had forgotten how to appreciate.

That seemingly pointless and completely inactive existence of ours put a great strain on our natural resources. We were obliged to feed on our own thoughts and imaginations. This was very hard to do for any length of time, and even the natural philosophers eventually got to a stage when everything went blank and they no longer felt able to cope. Then a letter would arrive and miraculously start up the fly wheel that drives the imagination. Now you had something to feed on, something to think about. After a time the wheel would run slower and slower. . . . Another letter would be needed to set it spinning again.

I wonder if the women who wrote those letters ever realised that they were the greatest single factor in our life and general efficiency. Politicians and the Press were always, quite rightly, handing them bouquets for Taking It, Sticking It and Going To It, but I think, in its less spectacular way, that Writing It was every bit as important. No C.O. would have been able to keep us well and in good order if our mail had not reached us. We needed food and drink to nourish our bodies, but we needed the right kind of thoughts to nourish our minds.

To say that it was patriotism that enabled us to live that artificial life for years on end, is the sheerest nonsense. Patriots who made statements like that ought to have tried it for a bit. Patriotism, sense of duty or some indefinable instinct, may give you an extra shove in the right direction at the height of battle, but it can never sustain you and keep you at peace with yourself day in, day out—not unless you are a fanatic. And that, I think, is one of the big differences between us and the people we were fighting. I am sure



that the Germans and the Japanese were nothing like as dependent upon letters as we were; they got their energy and drive from pure fanatical belief in the Fuhrer, the Glorious Fatherland or the Son of Heaven. We got ours from a desire to live and do things for their own sake. To be reminded of why we wanted to live and what we wanted to do, we needed the thought of the people we loved constantly fresh in our minds.

At one-thirty, when we came into the mess for lunch, the table was stacked with letters in alphabetical order. Everyone pounced on their particular pile. Someone in the scrum, having failed to find a letter under his own initial and hoping that his had slipped into the wrong pile, would begin searching feverishly through all the others. He might have been without mail for a week, maybe longer, and yet he was certain that his wife or girl friend had written to him almost every day. He was frantic and terribly upset.

The lucky ones were those whose mail had been following them round and had finally caught up with them. They counted their letters, turned them over and over, looked at the sender's name and the date of the postmark, announcing all this with glee to anyone who happened to be standing near. Then they would wander off still muttering, find a comfortable corner and settle down. For the next twenty minutes or so, these men were no longer soldiers in India, they were just ordinary, happy people, entirely oblivious of their surroundings. Thousands of miles from their homes, they were probably nearer to them than they had ever been before. In England, on a station, no one would ever have dreamt of discussing the contents of his mail, but here it was quite different. We told each other our private news quite unashamedly; it was the most exciting and real thing in our lives and was far too important to keep to ourselves.

Answering letters was almost as important as receiving



then. It gave you the same satisfaction and peace. For most of us, writing was the greatest recreation we had. To know that you had letters to answer gave you a wonderful feeling of anticipation ; you hugged the idea, it was a secret pleasure that went everywhere with you during the day. An evening spent writing was another way of opening the door into that lovely, normal, private world. And because the person to whom you had written was still very close to you when you got up to post your letter, the door did not immediately close. You were still filled with a mixture of elation and contentment when you went to bed that night, and you fell asleep at once.



PARADISE REGAINED

IN THE middle of June the heat became unbearable. The sky had been cloudless for weeks, there was no breeze, and the temperature was always over one hundred and ten degrees; at night it still remained over the hundred mark, you woke in the morning sodden with sweat, tired, devitalized and terribly thirsty. There was no water for showers, you were not hungry and as soon as you had gulped down your first cup of tea it seemed to come oozing out of your pores. Then you were thirsty again. But you did not dare to drink for the sake of your skin; it was sore and covered with prickly heat. It itched and hurt where it had gone septic whenever it touched your clothes. There were no fans and when you sat down to write a letter the sweat from your hand and forehead dripped on the paper and soaked it. You could not concentrate. Fewer and fewer letters were written and less and less work was done. There was only the bar to tempt you and you spent most of the time fidgeting stickily on chairs or tossing on your damp charphoy. For the first time nobody cared that there was nothing for us to do on the station. No one could care under these conditions.

I don't know how long this lasted; I lost all sense of time. But suddenly one morning something in me clicked. I came to the surface and grabbed the dripping, apathetic Johnny by the shoulder:

"We're going on leave."

Johnny blinked up in surprise and said in a dreary voice:

"How the hell can we? You know every Hill Station's full up."



"We're going," I said, vague but determined.

An hour later we stood in front of the C.O.

"But have you any addresses? Do you realise all the Hill Stations are full?"

We explained that we had some friends in Calcutta whom we thought might be able to fix us up.

"Well, I see no objection but I certainly would not advise Calcutta at this time of the year.

Calcutta three days later was like a Turkish bath, but our friends proved helpful, and, the necessary arrangements made, we were soon on the six-day journey to Kashmir.

After five days we arrived at Rawalpindi. From here trucks were to take us two hundred miles through the Himalayas to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. By the time we had climbed seven thousand feet to the large hill station of Murree our apathy had left us. It was like coming round from an anæsthetic; breathing oxygen after ether. Looking down at the vast plain of India one could see it shimmering and smouldering like the everlasting lake of fire and brimstone in the Bible. We were no longer among the damned and what was more we were on holiday. We began to laugh. It was evident that some of our fellow-passengers, for the moment anyway, could not share our elation. They were too busy hanging out of the truck being sick, as it lurched from left to right up the spiral of the mountain road.

There was an obvious holiday atmosphere in Murree. Leave camps, convalescent homes and cafes were set up in the woods on either side of the road. Here young servicemen and girls in white shirts and shorts rode or walked among the trees. They were all armed with cameras and wore those peculiar mass-produced hats that you see in every leave centre all over India.

Beyond Murree the road drops for five thousand feet into a narrow valley, to follow the course of a foaming



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Down and down we rolled with the engine switched off, a terrible stink of brake linings and from time to time a screech of gears, when the Indian driver suddenly changed his mind about the reliability of his brakes. The mountain-sides, terraced into thousands of little fields, which were flooded and reflected the blue sky, glittered and sparkled. Each field was surrounded by a frill of incredibly lush grass and this green was splashed with red where the rocks and soil were visible. Native huts with flat red mud roofs were built into the steps of these rice plantations. But one hardly noticed them; they were dwarfed by the huge-scale panorama which swept down before us as far as the eye could see.

We dropped into the valley and then began to climb again, following the river. After several hours we came through the pass which leads into the great plain of Kashmir, five thousand feet above sea level, and entirely surrounded by the snow-covered Himalayas. In the far distance the snow line seemed to touch the green of the plain and in the foreground the dark pine woods reached up into the snow. We saw what we had not seen since we left England; golden cornfields strewn with scarlet poppies and blue cornflowers; a long road lined with tall poplars; green water meadows; orchards and gardens. Beside the road, and winding over the whole plain, were little streams with weeping willows and from time to time we met the river that we had been following through the valley. Now it was wide and flowed along slowly and contentedly. Sometimes it spread out into lakes, and here small towns or villages built entirely of wood had sprung up on its banks. The wide, straight road ran on and on until the poplars merged into the sky. We came to paddy fields where the women in their quaint embroidered dresses and their large silver ear and nose rings stood working knee deep in the water while the men stood around supervising.



and so at last we came to Srinagar. We had booked a houseboat by telegram and its Kitmaghar in a white turban and clean uniform was waiting in his shikarah to take us across to our new home. The houseboat was delightful; it was built of natural wood and covered with a coloured awning under which deck-chairs and tables were arranged as though for a tea-party. A little carved wooden fence ran round the deck which was gaily decorated with geraniums. There were three large bedrooms, a pantry, a dining-room and sitting-room with bright Kashmir carpets and curtains, comfortable furniture and lots of flowers. Our staff of four servants and the Kitmaghar's wife lived in the small domestic houseboat attached to ours. Everything was perfect; we began to feel at home at once.

Then came the first hot bath we had had for months. Our reaction to a hot bath back at the Station—always supposing there had been any water—would have been like that of a drowning man offered a glass of lemonade. Here it was the high spot so far, the symbol of our rebirth into a cool world. Next it was the turn of our stomachs, deadened by an unending cycle of tinned rations, numbers one to four. Tonight's dinner *was* a dinner; a succulent roast duck, fresh cauliflowers and peas, fruit and creamy custard. And so to sleep, real sleep, wrapped in three blankets with the cool air on your face.

Srinagar is a town full of waterways, bridges and canals reminiscent of Venice. The normal means of transport is the shikara which is not unlike a gondola. Houses reach down into the water and in the centre of the old town shops line the canals which are narrow and congested with traffic. The boatmen handle their craft skilfully and there are amazingly few collisions but lots of near misses accompanied by insults and shouts in the manner of Paris taxi drivers.

Our houseboat, along with many others, was moored



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Just outside the town. These floating homes with their flowers, striped awnings and heavily carved windows and doors were all colours, shapes and sizes, from two-roomed slender little craft to great two-storeyed affairs with covered entrances, balconies and buildings attached.

Once out of the town, you found yourself in one of those strange, blurred landscapes which are so typical of the plain of Kashmir. Weedy canals, woods which have their roots in the water, flooded fields and floating gardens seem to swim in a haze of liquid green. The floating gardens are built on a foundation of tightly packed weeds. The gardener twists his fork round and round in the water, as if he were eating spaghetti, until it is completely covered. Like this he loads his small craft until it practically sinks. The foundation is heaped with earth on which cucumbers, melons, cabbages and salads grow at a fantastic speed. The gardeners paddle in between their plots, squatting at the very end of their boats. They do all their work from this position. The gardens, which are only a hundred and fifty feet long, are very narrow and can be moved quite easily. It is not unusual for a horticultural gentleman to appropriate one of his neighbour's gardens and attach it neatly to his own during the night. Next morning there are ugly scenes, with accusations, threats and a great deal of shouting. The gentlemen can be seen gesticulating wildly and hopping up and down in their boats while a whole regatta of other small craft assemble to see the fun. Sometimes, of course, when the current is fast or the wind is strong, a garden has been known to change owners without any outside help. Then it can be legitimately claimed as a Gift of Allah.

That the men of Kashmir are taller and the women and girls prettier, and that both look healthier and more contented than the people of the plain is not surprising. What is surprising is the fact that this hardy Aryan race, living



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It was the snow that drew us ; snow in India, snow in July.

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*I felt I had been here before ; the atmosphere
reminded me of Switzerland.*



The strangest and most bewildering of all their art forms.

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The holy conch-shell is the first of the wind instruments. It has the same dignity and significance for the Indians as the trumpet has in the West.

p. 126.



infertile valley of pleasant summers and freezing winters, are still as Indian as any other Indians. That common denominator, which I noticed so often, does not even alter on the far side of a barrier the size of the Himalayas.

We found a quiet mooring place on the Nagin Bag Lake, to which we moved our houseboat. There we settled down to swim, ride and explore the other lakes and the wonderful centuries old Shalimar Gardens, built by the Mogul Kings on their way down to the plains of India.

Ten days later we had recovered our strength and, along with it, our curiosity. We were no longer satisfied with our tame, lazy life on the lake. We decided to go on to Gulmarg, a small hill station about thirty miles away and nine thousand feet high. It was the snow that drew us ; snow in India, snow in July, the thought was irresistible.

There is no railway up to Gulmarg ; you start the journey by car and finish the climb on ponies. You come at last to a plateau covered with intensely green alpine grass, thick and springy like the carpet in the foyer of a super cinema. Simple log huts are dotted irregularly about the plateau which is ringed with dark green woods of giant pine. Above these are steeply sloping meadows. Reaching down the slopes in the gullies and nullahs are the long white fingers of the snow.

I felt as if I had been here before ; the atmosphere reminded me of Switzerland and ski-ing and climbing in the high Alps. Up here there were no wheeled vehicles of any kind, not even an ox-cart. Everyone rode or climbed. Everyone used their muscles and got that mysterious satisfaction and sense of achievement that only physical exercise brings. The thin mountain air induces such a feeling of irresponsibility and friendliness among the people who are all there for the same reason. That common interest in the beauty and danger of the snow is hard to beat. Life in the mountains is completely natural ; I think that is the secret. Natural



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short in natural surroundings. But to describe in any detail the scenery and the life we led can never convey what we felt about them at the time. I can only attempt to set down one or two sensations which remain especially clear in my memory.

Riding up through the tall woods, the ponies picking their way along the rough track, we reached a little plateau about eleven thousand feet high. Here we dismounted and started climbing. The grass grew even shorter and thicker and was starred with tiny vivid alpine flowers. They were the flowers of the plain reduced to scale, as though through the wrong end of a telescope, and correspondingly brighter. We reached the snow and began to climb up the steep icy crust. We sweated along, sliding and stumbling laboriously, often losing more height than we had gained. Then, as the ice became thinner, we broke through, sinking knee deep into the soft snow beneath and scratching our legs and ankles. As the air became thinner, we began to pant and puff. Every fresh step seemed to use our last ounce of energy and there was still another thousand feet to go.

At last we stood at the top, feeling dizzy and exhausted, but with an indescribable feeling of pride and satisfaction. A limitless white sheet of a frozen lake lay before us surrounded by myriad white peaks of the Himalayas. We were on top of the world. This was our reward.

Tramping through the deep snow with a sledge on your back, still out of breath, you look down and calculate the four thousand feet drop which leads on to the green grass, plotting the course, past boulders and rocks. Then you take the plunge. Tightly perched astride your sledge, braking with your feet, you begin to move faster and faster. The snow from your heels sprays up and hits your face. You try to see and steer but your face gets numb, your eyes clogged up with sticky snow. You try to brake, leaning



right back to give your legs more strength, almost lying on the sledge, but still you move faster and faster. A big boulder looms up in front of you. There is nothing to do but throw yourself off. You roll and roll through the soft snow, still gripping the sledge. You watch the others coming down, struggling and throwing themselves into the snow just like you. You shout to them and laugh and get on the sledge again and promise yourself that this time you'll stick on and not give way to your fear.

Down on the grass, soaking wet with your face and hands stinging from the cold, you feel the thrill of achievement and a simple complete happiness. Then to sit on the terrace of the hotel, your clothes drying on you in the warm sunshine, drinking tea and eating wild strawberries and cream.

Coming home exhausted after a day's mountaineering with every muscle singing like a telegraph wire, to sit before a fire of crackling pine logs sipping whisky.

Dancing all night in the warm wooden annexe of Nidou's Hotel. The gay atmosphere of holiday friendship; everybody knowing everybody, the pretty evening dresses of the girls, the eggs, bacon and strong coffee in the morning room at four a.m., the ride back to the hut in the frosty dawn as the first light turns from sapphire to ruby behind the vast outline of the Himalayas.



VII

WAR AND PEACE

DURING those first six months in India, from the military point of view, we had been twiddling our thumbs in a very hot vacuum. We had constantly to remind ourselves why we were there ; it was the only antidote to the feeling of aimlessness from which we all suffered during this time. When things finally began to move and our long period of inactivity gave way to bustle and preparation, it was a great relief. In the vacuum we had somehow lost our identity ; now we found it again.

We began to be posted about on a succession of courses. First came six weeks of strenuous army training at the most pukka O.T.S. in India. This was quite an experience for a bunch of rather undisciplined R.A.F. and army pilots, many of whom knew little or nothing of Bull as such. Here we met it in all its genuine, traditional, diehard glory. We mounted and dismounted bicycles by numbers, we dug and built defences by numbers and we marched past innumerable flags by numbers. We also learned a lot about the leadership of Indian troops. And every Saturday a different general—they seem to be two a penny in India—was laid on to speak to us and tell us we were a “ fine body of men.” One of them, waxing eloquent, made the mysterious pronouncement that we (the Glider Pilots) were the “pioneers of a brand new form of warfare at which the 14th Army is already expert.” When we printed this verbatim in our O.T.S. magazine, it was angrily blue-pencilled by the Colonel who told us it was not our business to quote the visiting generals.



They worked us hard, but the living conditions were superb; all that an Officer and a Gentleman could have desired. Then came an Air Crew Jungle Course, five thousand feet up in the hills. We found ourselves mainly concerned with the art of self-preservation, playing Boy Scouts and having a very good time in pleasantly wild surroundings. We learned how to make a meal from bamboo shoots and other roots, how to make utensils from bamboo trunks, how to make traps for wild animals, build shelters against the sun and rain and cross rivers on bamboo floats. In groups of four we went for four-day treks into the jungle with only an emergency ration and a compass. Besides all this we received instruction on how to bribe the numerous Burmese tribes into a friendly frame of mind.

By the time this course came to an end, we knew we hadn't got long to wait. When we came down from the hills, we were to collect our new aircraft and fly them to meet the Airborne troops we were scheduled to carry into action. Speculation began as to How, When and Where. The 14th Army was almost in Rangoon. Would our op. be designed to cut off the Malayan peninsula, or would we find ourselves landing on Singapore?

The new boys were terribly excited; now at last they were going to see some action. They had been training to be pilots and going through army courses for over two years. They were fed up with theory and wanted to put what they had learned into practice. They had been working and being systematically worked up to this moment for so long that they could not help dramatising their own part in the forthcoming battle. They wanted to get cracking; the quicker the better.

For the old boys it was quite another story. They could not share this feeling of elation and urgency, even if they had wanted to. They had been in action before; had seen aircraft crashing, wounded in agony and had known the



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deliberate slow-motion horror of mortar fire. Fighting for them was no longer an exciting new experience and most of them had only narrowly escaped being killed during the European landings. The idea of death was very real; so was being taken prisoner or being wounded. They were glad that the restlessness and waiting were over but they were not looking forward to fighting the Japs. The Germans were the devil they knew, the suicidal fanaticism of the Japanese was an unpleasantly unknown quantity. This unknown quantity had got to be fought, so they would fight it, but in a calm businesslike spirit. They would be a good deal more careful than they had been the first time; then it was impossible to conceive of being a casualty. Now, none of them could help thinking about it—now that they had sampled reality.

The new boys were the romantics, the old sweats were the philosophers; one wondered which of us would make the better fighters.

The night before we left our training camp in the hills, we had an ENSA show as a special treat. Our spell in the jungle had made us a highly receptive audience, and when, in the opening chorus, the performers urged us to "Have a good time, join the party! Let's all be happy and gay ta ra ra. . . ." we should have been only too delighted to oblige them. In spite of our uncritical mood, the mother-in-law jokes, the lady who impersonated a Sgt. Major and the little man dressed as a private—whose trousers fell off and who made rude noises behind her back—did not get the belly laughs for which one assumes they were included in the bill. Nor was the opulent girl in a sailor suit who did a skipping rope solo much more successful. Only the brassy blondes, who romped on and off the stage lifting their skirts, letting down their brassieres and slapping each other's behinds, seemed entirely satisfied with the barrage of whistles, catcalls and sucking noises that greeted

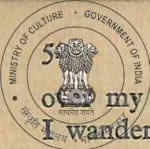


them every entrance. The pay-off came in the shape of a very old gentleman, who lay on a contraption that looked like a cross between a Heath Robinson operating table and the Iron Maiden of Nuremberg, with a violin attached to his left foot and a bow screwed to his right. To say that he played would be an overstatement, but by the most excruciating contortions he did produce a few laboured sounds, while coming dangerously near apoplexy in the process. The strain was too much for artiste and audience; he collapsed, purple faced, on his operating table and was dragged from the stage and we beat it for the bar.

As we were due to move off at dawn, the bar was closing early and we only just made it. We crowded round waiting for our drinks. The news was on and someone standing near the wireless ssh-ed us impatiently. The wireless was saying that Japan had sued for peace. . . . There was a moment's pause and then the penny dropped: the war was over.

Then the shouting started. Then the officers came over from their side to find out what had happened. Then there were drinks all round and drinks all round and so it went on for I don't know how long.

To be drunk with whisky, gin, rum and real happiness is a rare and beautiful sensation. Because it is so beautiful, it brings an irresistible desire to share it with someone who is very near to you. That was why I sat down in the middle of this binge to end binges, with glasses being broken, furniture smashed and things set alight all round me, and wrote three letters in a big unsteady scrawl. After that I remember very little; what happened later was told me next morning. When I eventually tried to find my way back to my tent, I lost my way and started wandering round the jungle in circles. I have a vague recollection of stumbling and bumping into trees and being desperately sick every few minutes. I was sick all



over my uniform and I could not stand the smell, so, as I wandered about, I undressed. By the time I found my tent, I was completely naked. I also had hiccoughs and could not stop gurking. The inhabitants of the neighbouring tents thought at first it was the lion which had been reported near our camp. When they discovered it was me, they tried to shut me up but I wouldn't—or couldn't—until someone gave me a cold bath. That brought me round for just long enough to stagger to my bed and pass out quietly.

Next day we were still trying to organise ourselves and cope with our hangovers at lunchtime, but eventually our convoy got off on its fifteen-hundred-mile journey. I had volunteered to drive and mechanic a three tonner on the trip, and our first stop was the nearest railway station where most of the men were to take the train. At the station they told us that last night's wireless report was a lot of hooey. The whole thing had been a rumour. The war wasn't over at all. Our immediate reaction to this was just an awful feeling of flatness and resentment at having been cheated into a first-class hangover. The obvious thing to do was to bloody well get drunk again. Luckily there was no opportunity.

It took us over three weeks to get to our new station. We crossed riverbeds, churned along soft slimy roads up to the axles in mud, started early in the morning with every vehicle in running order and finished at night with each one limping along with another in tow. We spent days by the roadside cooking over open fires while we did major repairs.

And all this time we never managed to get any definite news; in some villages they knew nothing—they didn't even seem to know there was a war on, but then maybe there wasn't. In others they told us the Japs had made peace; a little farther on we would hear that they were



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still fighting. The uncertainty made us irritable and jumpy; one minute our imaginations were switched on to peace, the next, they were turned back to war again. We discussed, we argued, we speculated, we prophesied, we laid bets, we went round and round and backwards and forwards, and over and over the eternal subject, until we wore it out—like a piece of elastic with no stretch in it.

When at last we did reach our station to find that it really was all over, that our main party had been recalled halfway, that nothing was prepared for us and that we were completely shut off from the outside world with no wireless, no newspapers and no mail, the sense of anti-climax, of coming up against nothing with no bump at all, was the most completely negative feeling I ever remember.

The monsoon had started and it rained most of the time. We lay on our charps all day and thought of or talked about the chances of getting home. There was nothing to do but wait. We were back in a vacuum again—a cooler one this time. In desperation I began to read detective stories.

This was so different from how I imagined the end of the war. I knew I ought to be deliriously happy; it was all I had ever wanted and dreamed of. I had thought about it and explored its implications so often that I had known exactly how I would feel that night in the jungle three weeks ago. But this blank that followed that first excitement was something I wasn't prepared for. I felt somehow that Peace had caught me on the wrong foot; I couldn't understand it and I couldn't understand myself.

And yet the feeling was vaguely familiar; it reminded me of something that had happened before. At first I couldn't place it. Then I remembered. It was like the beginning of the war; the enthusiasm and then the disappointment and frustration when one could not translate one's thoughts and desires into action. It did seem strange,



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when you came to think of it, that the start of peace should evoke the same sensations as the start of war. Strange, most unexpected, but comforting when you thought a bit harder because, after all. . . . But it really is a very small world.



WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

WHEN the Americans were sent to Europe, they were issued with the most comprehensive literature about the countries they were going to and the different people they were likely to meet. They were told what to expect and how to behave before they got there. Everything possible was done to eliminate trial and error. I think our forces did get some sort of gen about Europe and North Africa, and I was afterwards told that A.B.C.A. had produced some pamphlets for the forces in India, but I certainly never came across anything to compare with what the Americans got. To begin with, anyway, the British soldier was left to find out about things for himself. Apparently the War Office didn't consider that India was worth bothering about. In view of the constant struggles of our statesmen to come to terms with the Indians, this just doesn't make sense when you come to think about it. If ever a country needed carefully explaining that country is India.

There are so many things out here to irritate and puzzle the soldier. And there are so many things to dislike. Justifiable dislike and irritation make for hasty judgment and prejudice.

Everything Indian is inferior. Trains are unpunctual, uncomfortable and slow. Food is bad. Meat is tough and tasteless, milk is invariably watered, eggs are half the size, vegetables are over-ripe, unripe or musty, and beer, if you can get it, is gassy and weak. Consumer goods are of the worst possible quality and poorest workmanship. And yet they are almost always more expensive than British



United States imports. You always feel that the manufacturer is only interested in his profits. You are reminded of this every day by lots of little things that you take completely for granted at home. Matches, for instance, that won't strike or, if they do, the head flies off and burns something. Pencils that cannot be sharpened because the lead consists of short separate pieces.

Everything is executed as cheaply as possible, but a lot of ingenuity and effort used to hide up the shoddy quality. I lost my fountain pen and was obliged to buy an Indian one for ten rupees. When I came to refill it, I pressed the lever and nothing happened. I could not unscrew it, there was no thread, it was glued. Inside I found some bakelite filings but that was all. The lever was purely ornamental ; just to fool the customer.

You can never just buy things in a shop, you have to examine them minutely as you are liable to find cardboard instead of leather, tin instead of silver, bone instead of ivory. And as for the celebrated hand workmanship in carving and embroidery, although at times you may find something that looks attractive, it is sure to be very rough and carelessly executed. Pride of workmanship simply does not exist. And in India there is no such thing as a fair price. If you decide to buy something, you have to start arguing and haggling. Every shopkeeper automatically tries to swindle you. You know it and he knows it.

Still more irritating to the British forces are the habits of the average Indian with whom they come into contact. A great many native bearers, sweepers and followers are always with the troops and usually move with them from station to station. These Indians wear European dress, mostly a kind of uniform, and have been with the forces for years. Yet their way of life has not altered fundamentally and they have not adopted any of our customs. They eat their own food, they have to be forced and continually



renewed to sleep under mosquito nets, and it is hopeless to tell them the elementary causes of malaria. They cannot take in that a fever (any disease to them is a fever) comes from a mosquito and still believe some evil spirit or God is responsible.

The idea that a hand could carry disease will never enter an Indian's head. You cannot teach them to lift a teapot by the handle instead of the spout and they always carry cups and glasses with their fingers inside. Kitchens and sculleries have to be constantly inspected; otherwise they get in to such a state of filth that the whole camp goes down with dysentery. Cooks can never be left alone; if they are, water won't be boiled, food covered, fruit dipped in antiseptic and hands washed before preparing food. An Army and Airforce order had to be introduced forbidding all bearers and followers in camps to touch any uncooked food, such as bread, fruit salad and raw vegetables.

Anything done by Indians, with the possible exception of clerical work, is done at a snail's pace. I have been with Siamese, Malayan, Chinese, Annamite and Palestinian Jewish bearers; we only needed the third of their number in our mess and camp. A merchant ship requires an Indian complement three times the size of one manned by any other Asiatic race. Every mess and hut is crowded with bearers standing around chattering and yawning. To see them all over the camp, lazing slouching and squatting is absolutely infuriating. There is no getting away from it they are fundamentally lazy people, and their main aim and object is to do as little as possible. They have no pride and very little conscience where work is concerned. More irritating than anything is their masterly way of playing dumb. When you call them and they eventually come ambling towards you, they simply don't understand what you want them to do. They just don't want to.

Apart from the climate and homesickness these outside



influences must and do condition the attitude of the soldiers and airmen to a very large degree. They all feel more or less superior but their practical attitude can be divided into two entirely different groups.

The majority, unfortunately, have in their relations with the Indians a definite resemblance to the Master Race. They don't really look upon the Indian as a human being and treat him accordingly. Yet, because of his undeniable resemblance to themselves, they don't treat him with the same kindness and consideration that they show to their animals at home. The feeling of superiority is a pleasant one and they delight in using their power. They make no attempt to use their understanding—I rather doubt if they have any understanding in the broader sense. To be patient and reason with an Indian takes time. It is much easier and quicker to be rough and tough with him, for he is frightened and dumb and quite unable to retaliate.

And so all their dealings with the natives are accompanied by shouting, swearing and swaggering. They drive their gharries at full speed through crowded streets, without a thought for the pedestrians and animals. The number of Indians killed and injured in our village alone was appalling. But none of our drivers who was responsible for these crimes ever got more than a warning, not a single one in my experience ever got a term in detention barracks. They had only killed a cow or a pig or a wog.

This form of hooliganism—or rather barbarism—is something that only comes out in these people in India; they would never dream of behaving like that in England. Except possibly the few tin-pot fascists who had a shot at it not so long ago.

One suspects that many in this group have been underdogs back home. They are busy giving what they think they got, now at last they have someone to give it to. If



Gandhi hadn't happened to preach non-violence these little supermen might not be quite so super. That they are of lower intelligence is obvious. Everything they see—stupidity, filth, disease, inefficiency—they immediately compare with England. And, of course, there can be no comparison. Why should they use their imaginations, why should they try to understand, why should they bother, when they detest everything Indian and hate being in India?

The second group admittedly still feels itself superior. They cannot help feeling that. They have regretfully discovered that the ideal of complete equality, with which most of them came here, simply does not work out with two such totally different stages of human development. But they do their best to remember that the slowness and dirtiness of the Indian is due to lack of education and training. Whatever they may feel about native superstitions and beliefs, they don't sneer at them. They are firm with their bearers and subordinates, one has to be, for like a quick-witted child the Indian soon discovers any weakness and takes advantage of it. But the most wayward child will come to terms with his elders if the grown-ups are sufficiently understanding. And an excellent relationship can and does result between native and white man when the latter uses his superiority as an example rather than a weapon.

One usually finds that this second group have a healthy curiosity about all things Indian; they are glad to take advantage of the chance to study other people. Logically, the first thing to do is, if you want to find out about someone, to get his confidence and make friends with him. The more they discover, the greater is their sense of obligation. But, for all that, the man with ideals has a rough row to hoe. It is easy enough to be a progressive and tolerant person in England, but so hard to be one in India. Here you are faced with the problem of really practising what you preach.



THEMSELVES

As soon as an Indian feels that you respect him and wish him well, that you are genuinely interested in his problems, he will open up and talk to you about anything on earth. But unless he is quite sure of you, you cannot get a word out of him. He has an ingrained distrust of the white man arising out of a feeling of inferiority. This makes him suspicious, hypersensitive and terribly anxious to impress you. He wants to impress you with the things that impress him, so you will never find him showing off about his wealth or possessions. He will, however, make great play with his degrees, if he has any, and given the slightest chance, treat you to a lot of abstruse talk on Aristotle or sonnet forms. While your acquaintance is still at the "impressive" stage and the Indian is mainly preoccupied with planting his mental capabilities, any sort of discussion between you is almost impossible. You are likely to ask a question and receive a completely irrelevant answer, or raise some topic which will call forth a spate of facts and figures that have no bearing upon it at all. This is confusing and irritating until you realise what is at the back of it. Until he knows you better, the Indian is not taking any risks; he is only telling what he knows. He will go on repeating facts and arguments that he has read and heard before till all's blue, but he is not going to be lead on to unknown ground where he might possibly make a fool of himself by displaying his ignorance.

The Indian's whole behaviour towards the European is conditioned by his own self consciousness. You get



that feeling all the time that he is speculating as to the effect he is making. You know he is watching you, and you can sense his anxiety to find out if you are favourably impressed. Your respect and your valuation of his abilities, intellect and character, will largely determine the degree of intimacy between you.

But once he really trusts you, he develops a deep, sentimental, almost doglike attachment for you. Indians are quite unlike white men in their friendship; there is nothing in the least casual about it. More than anything it resembles the emotional relationships between school-boys. It has to be cultivated and expressed; it needs constant reassurance. You have to tell your friend how much you admire and like him and what importance you attach to his presence. You have to be careful to invite him regularly and remember to ask his opinion. You are expected to take an interest in everything that concerns him and always be ready to offer advice and help.

Whatever you are to the Indian, political enemy, hated rival or intimate friend, he is always polite. His perfect manners and his natural helpfulness are not affected by his likes and dislikes. His ability to combine non-cooperation with charm is quite phenomenal and takes a bit of getting used to. Indians can and do hate us as a race, as a people, as a nation—as a matter of principle, but their hatred does not apply to us as individuals. After dashing off a vitriolic attack on the British Raj for his local paper, an editor or leader writer will go off and have the most amicable meal and conversation with an Englishman. He will neither mention nor think about what he has been writing. That has nothing whatever to do with his personal relationships; nothing to do with this white man whom he calls his friend.

After the war came to an end, I was attached for a time to an army newspaper and I was sent periodically to ask



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favours of the *Hindusthan Standard*, the *Star of India* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, all of them violently anti-British. Having read their slashing diatribes, I felt terribly embarrassed about going to their offices, and the first time I went I fully expected to be kicked downstairs or at least have the door slammed in my face. But I met with no animosity of any kind; on the contrary, I was always made welcome, anything I asked for was always granted in the most generous way and I could not possibly have met with more kindness and co-operation.

What the Indians write and say in public is quite different from what they think and say in private; as soon as you know them and they know you, this is taken as a matter of course. In your personal dealings with them, you will invariably be struck by their tolerance and helpfulness. The enmity that they feel for the white man will be worked out in the game of politics they are playing behind your back. For politics is a game to them; a game for which they have a remarkable natural aptitude. Nothing shows up their abilities to greater advantage. They can attack swiftly and argue tenaciously, and they have any amount of tact which enables them to be very persuasive and keep their opponent in a good temper. But this political flair does make any assessment of their character very difficult and it often misleads people into thinking that they are fundamentally dishonest.

They have a keen sense of humour which they do not mind turning against themselves, but much of their laughter is rather cynical and bitter. Jokes at other people's expense give them an almost sadistic pleasure, and the joy of the less-educated Indians is positively shameless if they can ever manage to score off a white man or catch him out in any kind of mistake. There is no nonsense about Indian humour and there is a very definite sting in it.

You will never have to worry about embarrassing an



Indian, once he has decided that you are his friend. You can talk to him as freely as you like without any fear of bringing up a sore or delicate subject. You can question and criticise his beliefs, his customs and his habits and tell him quite frankly that you think many of them are primitive, cruel and unclean. He will not be in the least offended and will agree or disagree with you quite objectively. But you will often be struck by the lack of logic in his arguments and his seeming inability to follow a train of thought. This usually means that you have hit on something that he finds himself unable to answer. Then his argument becomes quite static and he just keeps on stubbornly reiterating what he has already said, until you change the subject. Then again, he will tend to plug one or two incredibly obvious points; so obvious, that there seems to be no point in mentioning them. This baffles you until you remember that, although you have always known that two blacks don't make a white or that there is no smoke without a fire, he may have only just discovered it. His make-up and upbringing are so entirely different from yours, that what is axiomatic to you may be almost if not quite incomprehensible to him. He will practically always be able to cite more chapters, more verses and more statistics than you can, and the quotation of the written word is one of his great standbys. Anything that comes out of a book fascinates him and takes on a special significance and truth in his eyes.

The educated Indians read with conscious delight, and have a deep, inborn love of all the arts. Their appreciation and profound admiration for Western culture is inclined to make you rather ashamed; their knowledge is so very comprehensive, it has a nasty way of showing up the gaps in your own. Many of my Indian friends not only had first-class collections of gramophone records, ranging from Bach and the late Beethoven quartettes to Shostakovitch and



Benjamin Britten, but there was nothing they did not know about the European and American orchestras and conductors and they had almost as many scores as records. Round their rooms hung reproductions of Renoirs, Cézannes and Van Goghs. It seemed that the Impressionist School was the one that most of them preferred, but their knowledge of Western painting did not stop there by any means. You could find all the great works of English literature, with a sprinkling of the best French, German and modern American books on their shelves. England, to many of the Indians I knew, is the most beautiful country in the world. The England in their mind's eye is the England of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, Cobbett and Hardy; my friends knew so much about it, one kept forgetting that they had never been there.

I knew a man in Congress, to whom I happened to speak of Shropshire, and Housman's "Wenlock Edge" came up in a flash. I found he had a quotation for almost every place I could mention. And his knowledge of the English countryside was not only literary, it was geographical, topographical and historical as well. He could talk of Norman architecture and Roman roads and a great many other things that I knew very little about. It was obvious that he knew England a great deal better than I did. I said didn't he think it was about time he went there, but he said he thought he had better not risk it. He was afraid he might be disappointed. The England that he loved so much was quite safe in his mind, and that was where he intended to keep it.

It was a little surprising that the Indians did not attempt to make up to the Americans and try to play them off against the British, but I never heard of any instances of attempted mischief-making on their part. And they never seemed to do anything about trying to arouse sympathy for their cause, as one had rather expected they would.

I think the reason for this is that the average Indian makes very little difference between the Americans, the British or any other European nation, so long as their skin is white. Countries, continents even, do not signify for him in the same way as colour. He approaches all white men with the same extreme caution, and treats them all with the same self-conscious, rather theatrical courtesy in his efforts to impress them. Their nationality is something with which he does not concern himself.

As one gets to know the Indian, one comes to understand his difficulties and failings and to like and admire his very many good qualities. But it is only by the study of the individual that these qualities can be sorted out, examined and appreciated. The Indians are always saying that we are much nicer individually than we are collectively, and that is exactly the way in which they appear to us.



WOMAN'S PLACE

INDIA has three major preoccupations : religion, "Quit India" and sex. Sex, meaning the enjoyment of women, is the Indian man's main recreation. Woman is in no sense his partner ; she is simply the instrument of his enjoyment, and can, in this capacity, be compared with the football, the piano or the chessboard.

I have never seen such pure physical perfection as is possessed by the Indian women of good family. But this exquisite grace and beauty is combined with a total lack of charm, mentality or any suggestion of character. They have the huge dark eyes of gazelles, their bones look as fragile as spun glass, their skins have a luminous pallor, their high, curving foreheads are unbelievably smooth and their small heart-shaped faces are poised on their necks like a perfect bloom on a long rounded stem. They have about as much personality as a lily in a florist's window, and they might just as well be kept in a vase. In point of fact they are kept in gilded cages, which amounts to almost the same thing. This entirely secluded life makes it impossible for them to be other than what they are. In the more prosperous strata of Indian society, they are there for one purpose only.

Indians of all classes and castes, Mohammedan or Hindu (except for a few of the highly westernised and progressive ones) believe implicitly that it is biological fact that no male can come into contact with a female without being seized with the mystical urge to reproduce his species. They have been believing that for so long that it has become



a faint. The issue is not a moral one any more than the desire to eat or sleep is. And it is something that exclusively concerns the male sex: women are considered to have no desires or passions, they are completely passive, but if they are to remain chaste, they must be rigorously guarded and secluded from the lustful male, brothers, uncles, cousins included.

And here you come up against one of the biggest stumbling blocks to the abolition of purdah and the emancipation of Indian women. Discuss the problem with quite advanced Indian men and they will assure you that, the male sex being what it is, the thing is just not practical. Family life would be destroyed and no woman would be safe. If you argue still further, citing innumerable examples of European or American men and women working and living side by side in factories, in the forces, in offices, in the arts, in every sphere of their joint lives, without sex rearing its ugly head, your Indian friends will laugh and wink and dig you in the ribs. They just don't believe you. Their conception of everyday European life is based on the premise that there is no difference between the European male and the Indian male, i.e., no European woman is safe with any European man under any circumstances, Q.E.D., there is no such thing as a virtuous European woman, married or otherwise. There are, on the other hand, plenty of virtuous Indian women, their system sees to that, for their system faces facts whereas Europeans, with all their talk of emancipation and equality, are merely hypocrites out for a good time. Your Indian friends will go on to tell you at enormous length that this free and easy European promiscuity can never aspire to the mystical heights of the sacred relationship between the Indian man and his selfless, unquestioningly devoted wife.

And yet, you will argue, this wife has only one function in her husband's life—except in the poorer classes where



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is the drudge, the breadwinner and the beast of burden as well. What about the close companionship, the joy of interests shared, the mutual respect and affection that play such a vital part in the successful Western marriage? The Indian's reply comes pat: any interest that diverts the woman from her sacred and joyful duty to husband and family is merely destructive. Companionship and affection indeed! They are not to be mentioned in the same breath with that incomprehensible beatitude, Indian Love.

That is the Indian's unshakeable argument and he will stick to it through thick and thin. The beauty of Indian Love is his justification for the life to which his women-kind are subjected. In his eyes the end justifies the means a thousand times over, and he considers the European is in no position to question this.

Perhaps he is right. The age-old relationship between Indian men and women, and their resulting standards of morality, are as much a part of themselves as the colour of their skin. Even with the best intentions in the world, the reformer will find himself in very deep water if he tries to effect any radical changes in this sphere of their lives. And anyway, what positive proof is there that the moral standards of the reformer—whoever he is—are necessarily the right ones? His standards are, after all, merely the result of his customs and his civilisation. There is nothing to prove that they are absolute standards or even that they are the best ones for India.

But the Beauty of Indian Love is, when all is said and done, only one side of the medal. How, you ask your Indian friend, do they account for the vast amount of time, money and energy that they waste in the company of prostitutes? What about the millions of unfortunate women who are absorbed into this terrifying industry? For it is an all-important industry in India; probably second only to



You have only to open any of the newspapers to see the quantity of advertising space devoted to sexual matters, or take a look round any bookshop to be staggered by the variety and quantity of pornographic literature and amatory text books. These books, which are produced exclusively for the home market and are printed in Urdu, Hindustani and Bengali, etc., are ten times more numerous than the translated *Kama-Sutra* and those other spicy publications, designed to give the foreigner a thrill. And they are studied as a matter of course by almost every man who can read, from the highest caste to the lowest. This was first brought home to me at our camp, when I discovered that they were the principal everyday reading matter of most of our bearers. There is nothing special about this, nothing in the nature of a vice or a cult; pornography is to the Indian what the detective story is to the European. And when one goes on to consider that the ratio of brothels in India (in our village back at the station there were nine) to pubs in England is about three to one, one begins to realise the vast dimensions of the Indian sex industry.

When taxed with all this, your friend will freely admit that what you have said is quite true. But, human—meaning male—nature being what it is, these are necessary evils arising out of man's insatiable reproductive urge. The trouble is really that boys will be boys. And so we go back to where we started; the argument has come full circle. Nothing much has emerged, except that Sacred Love must be preserved at all costs, that Profane Love is a biological necessity and women. . . ? On either side of the blanket, they are merely a means to an end.



THE ROOT OF THE TROUBLE

THE sacred city of Benares is the heart and soul of Hindu India. To me it is the symbol of India's unhappiness ; the ulcer that poisons her whole system. From all over the country, the faithful come to the holy Ganges to purify their tortured bodies and souls, believing that through submission they will be saved from evil.

Evil of one sort or another sweats out of every stone in Benares ; it is the preoccupation of all who come there. The evil gods have to be pacified and protection from them must be implored from the good gods. The diseased and crippled come there to meditate on the evil that they did in a former life which brought upon them their present incarnation. The dying come there for it is believed that all who die in Benares will be liberated from the recurring evil of reincarnation. The dead are brought there so that their ashes may be strewn on the water of the holy Ganges to wash the evil from their souls. Evil is everywhere, evil and fear.

Two thousand temples are sandwiched against each other along the river bank, where are also to be found the age-old pilgrims' rest houses. Each one of these, which are terraced and twelve or more storeys high, belongs to the ruler of a state to afford shelter for his subjects on pilgrimage. From the temples, wide steps lead into the holy water—muddy and polluted with the sewage of Benares—into which thousands go down fully clothed to bathe and drink. From the tall funeral pyres which burn along the banks, rises the sickly sweet smell of burning



flashed. You see the bodies, wrapped in white sheets, slowly begin to stir as the heat causes the muscles to contract. A head moves, a foot kicks convulsively or a hand writhes as if in agony. Then the priest takes a long fork and pokes the offending limb back into place.

Once in the nightmarish labyrinth of passages and tunnels and narrow alleyways that run under and between and behind the temples, you feel there is no escape. Thousands of people are milling to and fro in the gloom and filth. Most of them are mumbling and spitting. You push past the beggars, the mutilated and the diseased; past food stalls and vendors selling flowers to offer to the gods; you in your turn are pushed and elbowed and breathed on; you step on a pie dog and it yelps, or your foot sinks into the droppings of a sacred cow. Through a small grille in a wall, you catch sight of a temple prostitute, squatting on the bare floor of her empty cubicle, waiting to accommodate the worshippers.

Through the smoky haze in the entrance of the temples, the fantastic shapes of the gods and goddesses can be seen. Their rusty red bodies are adorned with flowers and cheap jewellery, and the light from the smoking oil lamps and flickering candles accentuates their cruel and devilish attitudes. The worshippers stand in a semi-circle round the god. They bow slowly as they chant their monotonous and seemingly endless hymns. In the gloom you can see their eyes shining brightly with fanatic devotion.

Fakirs are everywhere; entirely naked or with a tiny loin-cloth. Their dark muscular bodies are powdered white and their long hair is dyed a yellowish red. On their faces and chests, the lines and symbols of their Gods are painted. They have this in common with the priests; this and begging. Everyone in every temple you go into begs.

You climb the narrow steps of the towering Temple

of Love between exaggerated phallic symbols made of marble and stone, mounted on carved pedestals. Siva's temple is adorned with innumerable bas-reliefs depicting the most realistic sex-orgies. In the little shrines are carved sex organs and more phallic symbols, painted rusty red and dimly lit by candles. The entire temple breathes pornography. The priest who shows you round, for a small tip, with pride and a dirty leer, is the most sensual-looking man you are ever likely to meet. His eyes, which protuude from deep sockets, are watery. His mouth is large and moist with thick, flabby lips. It is half-open and he breathes heavily. His bronze face is fat, with high prominent cheekbones. His nose is flat with a greasy high-light. He is the ideal minister for the Goddess of Sex, for the word Love in this context becomes a hideous travesty.

Benares is the Vatican of the Hindu world and the Brahmins, the priests, are the highest caste in the Hindu social scale. They are the hereditary spiritual leaders of the people. As present day India has not yet reached or perhaps regained a standard of civilisation comparable with ours in the middle ages, these Brahmins should be doing the work performed by the Christian clergy at that time. One would expect to find them educating their followers, teaching them how to read and write, how to plough and sow, how to live. But the Brahmins' duties have become lost in a welter of rites, cults and procedures. All they are concerned with is the business of running the temples and praying. It is not necessary for them to do anything for the people but pray for them. The Brahmin is therefore a parasite, he does not work for the good of the community ; on the contrary, it has to support him. Once, centuries ago, he served the people, now the people serve him. The reason for this degeneration is a simple one ; the Brahmin inherits his position, his privilege is automatic, there is no question of a vocation as with the Christian clergy. The



Lower castes inherit their Brahmins, there is nothing they can do about it either.

Here in Benares I realised for the first time the supreme civilising influence of Christianity, which drew to itself the men of good will, the scholars, the idealists, and sent them out into the world with a practical and easily understood message.

In the beginning the Hindu religion had a practical simplicity, but as time went on fables, myths, historical legends and parables began to be used and finally became part of the actual creed. Originally there was only one god, Brahma, Father of all the World. He developed into a triumvirate of deities, Brahma—Vishnu—Shiva, representing Creation, Preservation and Destruction. The triumvirate, with the help of those legends, split up again and again and again multiplying like bacteria. Now there is such a formidable jumble of gods, demi gods, buffalo gods, monkey gods, elephant gods, cow gods, tree gods, ogres, serpents, beautiful princesses and demons that no one seems to be able to keep pace with them. Most of them are in the habit of reincarnating themselves whenever they feel like it and, what is even more confusing, changing their names.

The whole set up is so complicated that even scholars cannot agree over the most elementary points. I discovered this when I started reading and asking questions with the view of taking some notes. I nearly went mad. Every book I consulted gave an entirely different picture. Each one attached a different importance to a different deity. Each one called each god by a different name. And when I consulted Hindu friends I was shocked by the incompleteness of their knowledge and by their vague evasive answers. I was forced to the conclusion that many of these better-educated Hindus are not altogether sincere in their belief and I think it is a good sign that they are not. They assured



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re that they do not follow the innumerable customs to do with eating, feasting and marrying. And that they regard many of the gods and their escapades merely as symbols. They do not keep the pujas (religious festivals), which occur almost every other day; it is only the ignorant masses who believe in all that.

And yet, after admitting their doubts and acknowledging the harmful effects of Hinduism to their country, they proceed to defend it in the spirit of "My religion right or wrong." Their defence is vague and inconclusive. They explain that the moral laws set out in books like the *Gita* have the same meaning as our Sermon on the Mount, that their myths and legends are comparable with Homer and Shakespeare, and that Hindu tolerance is far greater than that of any other faith, including Christianity. From their point of view, all these arguments may hold water but the question one is forced to ask is; where do they lead? And the terrible answer is Benares.



CALCUTTA

To stand on the Howrah bridge in Calcutta, with the stench of the wide, sluggish Hooghly river in your nostrils, is to be at the very heart of this restless, overpopulated city. The geography books say that Calcutta is the second biggest city in the Empire ; anyone who has been there and done any exploring, will almost certainly tell you that more astounding contrasts are to be found within the city limits than anywhere else in the world. I don't know if the travelogues and rambling reporters have ever referred to Calcutta as the Jewel of the East ; the chances are that they have, because everything they touch with their glorious technicolour automatically becomes a jewel. This is certainly the largest, oddest and phoniest they are ever likely to photograph.

On the vast modern silvery steel structure of the bridge, which connects the east with the west town, the whole microcosm of Calcutta parades past you, day and night. What appears to be every size and shape of the human species pads along the narrow footpaths on either side of the smooth roadway. Skins are of all shades, features a cross-section of many races. Some are dignified and tall, others undersized and fearful. Some heads are swathed in turbans ; others are shaven except for one tiny lock, symbolic of the Hindu religion ; others have hair down to the shoulders or, if they happen to be Sikhs, have it screwed up into a little bun which is tied up in a piece of cloth. People wear big shawls round their necks, or are draped in thin blankets or white sheets ; dhoties are worn or



106, wide-legged linen trousers with white or coloured shirts with their tails hanging out. There are loin-cloths, rags and ill-fitting Edwardian suits with Norfolk jackets and stove-pipe trousers. There is no such thing as fashion in India; everyone dresses according to the tradition of his caste, creed, community or profession, and these divisions run into thousands. Nowhere in the world will you see such picturesque individuality. Naked men pass you carrying huge bundles on their heads, while the office workers carry umbrellas to shade them from the sun.

Such women as you see are, as always, less obtrusive than the men. They are mostly of the lower, scheduled castes and are dressed in dirty brown ragged saris. They usually go in convoys, single file like pack mules, balancing their loads on their heads and led by their owner or guide. At regular intervals, the beggars are to be found squatting in the gutter. Where there is life in India, there are always beggars.

Next to the footpath is the never-ending stream of overloaded carts and wagons, toiling up the gradient of the arching central span. Man and beast strain and haul and shove, muscles bulging, heads down, eyes glassy and vacant, the sweat rolling off their backs. The two-wheeled bullock-carts, with their shafts resting on the sore necks of the quietly suffering water buffaloes, are almost twenty feet long. They are piled high with sacks of flour or coal. Shouting, lashing and kicking, the driver sits on the top of his load or on the shaft and, with the axles screeching horribly, the contraption trundles laboriously on its way. Only a little smaller than the bullock-carts are the vehicles drawn by the lean, barefooted coolies. Their black skins drip in the burning sun as they toil on, their minds blank, driven on by circumstances they have long since forgotten to question.

Nearer the middle, on either side of the road, are two



more streams of traffic. Rickshaw wallahs trot mechanically along drawing their light vehicles piled high with all sorts of goods or perhaps with two fat babus squashed into the narrow seat. Then there are the gharries; every imaginable shape and size, drawn by skinny tired horses. Some gharries are closed with heavily curtained windows; you catch sight of a girl's face peeping shyly through a chink. Inside the ladies are carefully hidden from the prying eyes of strangers while the menfolk and children sit on the roof and the driving seat. Some of the rickshaws are also closed; they have their hoods up and a tarpaulin hanging over the front. One only sees a pair of feet and perhaps a pair of eyes peeping out, for a lady of high birth must never be seen by a stranger.

In the centre of the bridge are the trams; their bells perpetually clanging to make way for their slow rattling progress. Passengers cling to the sides and the back. Inside they are so overcrowded, one wonders how they manage to breathe. Old, ramshackle buses, as full to bursting as the trams, follow them. Between the tramlines, taxis with service men or Indian babus, large silent American cars with smart perfectly dressed Sahibs and Memsahibs glide speedily past. Periodically, everything has to stop whilst a herd of cows or goats are chivvied across the bridge. Sometimes an odd cow with a small calf decides to cross the bridge, against the traffic; the result is complete chaos, but she continues to worm her way through the conglomeration of buses, trams and gharries, rickshaws and cars, oblivious of all the confusion.

A taxi lashes past, with two slender and well-dressed Anglo-Indian girls, their long Hollywood-styled hair streaming in the breeze. A big open Bentley, crowded with happily shrieking children, is driven by a fair, beautiful woman. On the footpath a few naked Indian children untie a filthy piece of rag and, squatting amidst the hubbub,



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begin to eat a little rice and a few dirty crusts of bread. Near them is a coolie fast asleep, quite undisturbed by the drumming and shouting as a Hindu procession passes by.

There is hardly a day without one of these mass meetings or processions in Calcutta. It is often difficult to say if they are religious or political; they are, in fact, very often both. In a country where politics and religion are so interwoven and treated so much alike, there is very little difference. Lorries flying huge flags and banners push their way at snail's pace through the traffic. The Indians inside shout in chorus *Tai hind* (meaning freedom) or perhaps the name of the god whose *pūja* it happens to be. Cars, trucks, rickshaws and bullock-carts overflowing with families of devotees follow with images, flowers and food offerings. Everyone shouts in rhythm and drums and a few blaring brass instruments add to the general babel; thousands follow on foot while the mounted police do their best to keep the whole disorderly mass on the move. The procession comes to a halt at the Ghat near the bridge. Everyone crowds round the bands, flags and images. As the celebrations reach their height, the noise increases until the powerful sirens and hooters of the liners in the harbour are no longer audible. The crowds split up into a series of columns and, each following their own image, go down to the river. Here the gods are immersed in the waters to the accompaniment of happy cheers and ecstatic "ohs" and "ahs." Then the worshippers disperse to all parts of the town and the holy river Hooghly gets down to business one more.

From the bridge you can see the harbour and the massive liners from all over the world, discharging their cargoes on to the quay or on to trailers, being loaded up or slowly towed out to sea. There are hundreds of smaller craft too; heavily laden and rowed by coolies who stand upright on the decks. The sailing junks have their sails patched in a hundred places; they look so old and worn and their



timbers are so rotten, it is surprising how they keep afloat. You follow the tramlines along the rough and very crowded road, but as soon as you turn off to your left, the hubbub dies down very quickly. Open spaces and well-kept houses appear and you find yourself in front of the huge wrought-iron gates of Government House. Vast, stately and peaceful, surrounded by wide green lawns and tall shady trees, it stands in a world of its own, miles and years removed from the town and the huge province it is ruling.

The European part of Calcutta occupies less than a tenth of the city. Here the English live, work and play. The buildings look European and so do the hotels, large shops, government and other offices. It *looks* European enough until you leave your car or taxi and begin to walk along the main streets. Chowringhee is Calcutta's Oxford Street, but for colour and excitement, the former makes the latter look like a wet Sunday afternoon. Here you don't have to walk into shops and ask for goods, anything and everything is sold on the buzzing street. You can buy parrots, diamonds, Bibles or pornographic literature, tiger skins, musical instruments, Leicas and monkey nuts, puppies and children's toys. Everything you want is there, but you don't have to ask for it; they pelt you with it. Crowds of Indians, from little toddlers to bearded old men accompany you wherever you go, offering their goods, cajolling, making prices and reducing them every ten yards. If you are carrying a bag or a parcel it is wrenched out of your hand by a coolie or a child who wants to carry it for you. If you happen to walk slowly, a sly-looking character will attach himself to you and offer to fix you up with "A proud college girl, very white, very young"—Calcutta's name for a prostitute. Every few yards along the pavement is a boy with a cheap tinny flute playing "Deep in the heart of Texas," hoping that you will buy the instrument just to get rid of him. In between the



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Artists, are the snake charmers, the beggars with their dressed-up monkeys and miserable one-string violins and the accordion players with their dolled-up little boys and girls, copying the dances of Carmen Miranda or Fred Astaire. You can have a shoe shine every few yards or a photograph taken at every corner. And while you walk along, rickshaws, gharries and taxis follow you in case you feel tired. . . . "Want to buy a pair of sandals or gloves?" "Carpets, pottery?" "Dirty pictures, proud college girls?" "Backsheesh, Sahib, no father, no mother." "Rajah Sahib!" "Shoe shine, Sahib!" "Parker fountain pens, Ronson lighters?" "Longines watches, gold cigarette cases, rubies, diamonds. . . ?" You can trust them to cheat you and make a sucker out of you. They will even sell you a cut price murder. The Goonas or thugs, whose job it is to do the dirty work, can fix you a bumping off for as little as twenty rupees.

There is plenty of crime in Calcutta, but one hears very little about it as so few of the cases are ever proven. This was what happened over the death of an invigilator at Calcutta University which took place whilst I was there. He caught an examinee, Shahjahan, cheating and disqualified him until the chief controller gave permission for him to carry on. The invigilator was threatened by Shahjahan, and three nights later a rickshaw with the dead invigilator was left in front of the hospital. Foul play was suspected, but for reasons which were never explained the post mortem was delayed for forty-eight hours, by which time the body was decomposed. The verdict at the Coroner's inquest was "Death by injury inflicted by a person or persons unknown, but the circumstantial evidence shows that the examinee Shahjahan is implicated." If you want to commit murder without dirtying your hands, Calcutta is the place for you.

Around the doors of the big hotels and restaurants,



the crowd of vendors and naked beggars is thickest. The uniformed porters have their work cut out to keep the entrances free of the rabble. Here, beautiful Indian women in exquisite gold and silver saris, accompanied by their stout well-groomed husbands, alight from their cars. Young servicemen, with their tarty Anglo-Indian girl friends, complete with American hair do and accent, park their jeeps. Perfectly tailored English business men, with their cool-looking, fair-skinned women, walk unconcernedly through the revolving doors.

Most of the prosperous-looking white people one sees in these restaurants are quite unconscious of the teeming life outside in the street. It just doesn't interest them, nor does Calcutta, neither does India. The real Calcutta, for them, does not exist at all ; except when it is forced to their notice by the smell of filth wafting in through the windows of their cars. All these people are kept busy devising means of escape ; escape from their empty, boring lives. For the civilians, even making money becomes a little monotonous, and those who are in the services have to do something to get away from routine. They have built up a completely artificial existence of their own and as far as they are concerned, this is life in Calcutta. Their hunting grounds are the country clubs, swimming clubs and night clubs, the bars and the racecourse. A great deal of gin and whisky are consumed and much time and ingenuity are expended running after the few white, or nearly white, women who are outnumbered by the men by about ten to one. The general idea is to get drunk pretty regularly, keep oneself occupied and, if possible, vaguely amused. But it really couldn't matter less anyway.

These people are not the pukkah sahib type, most of whom are terribly busy nowadays. They are a mixed and floating population. One might call them the South East Asia Café Society. Many of them are in the services, at



Q. perhaps, or on long leave waiting about to be de mobbed. Some of them are English business men with all sorts of interests," just what, one never really finds out.

There are people on missions, engineers, representatives, French officers and civil servants connected with the trouble in French Indo China, Polish officers and civilians (homeless and wandering like the Jews are said to be), or civilians freed from internment in Malaya, vaguely trying to decide what to do. There are war correspondents with lots of time, and Americans with time, money and usually a girl.

With life in the raw all round them, they spend their days at the swimming club; their food and drink brought to them on the lawn, or at the shaded tables surrounding the open-air pool. If the sun is too hot, then the inside pool is more refreshing. They sit under the fans in the bars of "Spencer's Hotel," the "Grand," the "Great Eastern" and "Firpo's," they talk and laugh rather too loudly and are bored.

In the evening, they move into the fantastically expensive night clubs for more drinks, more talk and women, if they are lucky. The shortage of women is chronic, especially the kind one can take to the pukkah joints. If standards were high, there wouldn't be any women at all. They cost you a packet, for they drink plenty of whisky which is as scarce and black market as they are. The higher class clubs, apart from the big hotels, are mostly a poor imitation of Hollywood. On the whole they are pretty drab and their floor shows are third rate. But wherever you go, "The 300," the "British-American," the "Hawaiian" or the "Winter Garden," you will always meet the same people who will always be saying the same things. There is always talk about other joints in places all over the East; everyone seems to have been to the same places and done the same things. It doesn't matter if it is



Singapore, Hongkong, Saigon, Kunming, Penang, Batavia or Shanghai; they can tell you where to get hooch, who lives where and who is doing what. They know all about their little world, wherever it happens to be. To sit and listen to them talking in their phoney-childish jargon, it is hard to realise that these people are in reality quite sane and normal, human beings. They are expatriates, suffering from the effects of a confined and unnatural life. This is what the East has done to them. There is rather too much reality in the East for their European taste, so they have run away from it altogether.

There is much less artificiality in the low joints, which are situated just on the fringe of the European quarter. One cannot take a respectable girl to one of these, but there are plenty of dance hostesses; anæmic, flat-chested Anglo-Indians, their faces powdered to a messy grey-white and nothing but money in their minds. These so-called night clubs are mostly garages and derelict halls, decorated with paper flowers and draggled garlands. Indians, Anglo-Indians and questionable European types sit round drinking and talking with a few totsies among them. Prices are even higher than in the better night spots; an entrance fee might be several pounds, and there is no guarantee that you will come out with anything you had when you went in. These places smell of bribery and corruption, and that is what they are mostly used for.

There is plenty of cheaper and less dubious entertainment to be had in Calcutta. One can always go to the pictures. The European cinemas are just like any at home, with all the latest films. In the hot season one goes to whatever film is showing just for refreshment; to enjoy the clean, refrigerated air which is pumped through the auditorium. One might be back at the Empire Leicester Square, with one difference. From the cheaper seats comes the perpetual sound of the Indians fighting a losing battle with their



universal catarrh. This noise, like the twittering of the birds, awakens you every morning. It is always at its loudest then, but like the bird noises it continues all through the day, only one gets used to it. Hawking and spitting and the painful clearing of throats is the theme song of Calcutta. The only time it stops is when everyone is asleep.

In the Indian cinemas, where native talkies are shown, this noise frequently drowns the sentimental whispers coming from the sound track. I often went to these cinemas, hoping to discover at least one really passable picture. But I never saw one. Hollywood has nothing on the Indian films for sentimentality and sloppiness. The stories are always so simple that you do not have to understand Bengali or Urdu or whatever language they happen to be made in. The leading men look like those pastel-tinted youths on French birthday cards; they gaze for hours with large, pathetic, desirous eyes at the innocent young girls. There are never any clinches; it is all the courtship of the eye and very amateurish at that. The only thing that is pleasing is the incidental music which is a nice blend of European and Indian. These films run for years and the audience, in between their hawking and spitting, cheer heartily, boo and hiss and enjoy the whole performance. The cinemas in Calcutta are always packed. Long queues wait patiently for hours. You hardly ever see women; only a few, westernised, daring and heavily veiled, protected by their menfolk.

When you come out of the pictures and force your way along Chowringhee again, you come to Central Avenue where the impressive *Statesman* building and other large business houses are situated. Our mess was just here, and only a few yards from it in the roadway was a large refuse bin. Out of this came the most disgusting stink which polluted the whole street. The trouble was that most of the Indians could not be bothered to tip their



garbage into the container but piled it up all round it, and often the dustcarts did not turn up for days. Every morning beggars would sit in the midst of the stinking refuse pile looking for food or anything useful. All through the day, the birds, cows, pie dogs and beggars had endless fun stirring and re-stirring the rubbish and at night, schools of fat rats tunnelled their way in and out, scavenging busily. A cat which had been poisoned by some of the garbage lay in front of our mess for ten days until the maggots had finished everything but a little of the fur. This was not the only refuse heap in Calcutta. They were to be found in almost every street. One found them only too easily if one had a sensitive nose.

If I were ever to be submitted to another of those free-association psychology tests or I.Q.s, which crop up at regular intervals in a soldier's career (I think I went through about six) and were given the word " Calcutta," my snap association would unquestionably be " Garbage," with " Stink " as a possible second choice. Under no circumstances would the words : " Second City of the Empire " occur to me in this context. While I was there, *The Statesman* brought out a special number entitled " Filthy Calcutta." It consisted of a collection of photographs, news reports, editorials and correspondence under headings like " Bengal Rot " and " The Drains Came." It dealt solely with " . . . the perennial squalor of the capital of Bengal." The best over-all picture of the set-up was in one of the reported " Statements by leading Calcutta citizens on the Garbage menace " : " Sir Torick Ameer Ali, officiating Chief Justice, Bengal, said that his first connection with garbage was judicial. He tried the famous suit against the Corporation by the owners of a house at the back of the New Market, claiming that the Corporation refuse dump from the Market was a nuisance. The photographs exhibited in that case were quite as attractive as anything



that *The Statesman* had published recently. The witnesses in that case were the vultures. His second connection with garbage was during the disturbances and strike of Dec-Jan., 1942-1943, when he founded the Calcutta Garbage Club, Theatre Road branch.

Since then he had seen a great deal of garbage both in and out of bins on his way to and from the High Court on a bicycle. This had made him realise that much of the indifference of the wealthier classes to this problem was due to the fact that they drove past in high-powered cars. . . . "The general apathy of the public," the officiating Chief Justice continued, "has been fairly constant during the period that I have been connected with garbage judicially and extra-judicially. . . . There have been certain changes since Jan., 1943. At that time the public of Calcutta used to regard a dustbin or the dump surrounding it as an emblem of social status. The finest dustbin of that day, both as to sight and smell, was on the pavement of Government House opposite Pelitis, as also were the finest beggars on the north pavement of Government House. The beggars have since disappeared and the dustbin is no more than normal. The second finest was on the pavement in Russell Street opposite the gate of the Commissioner, Presidency Division. During the last few months pre-eminence has been obtained by that recently photographed by *The Statesman* in the vicinity of the house of the Commissioner of Police.

"I see that the Mayor, who has fortunately become garbage-minded, has put part of the blame on the I.C.S. While I myself, who failed to qualify for that service, often enjoy criticism of it, I have now found a conclusive answer to the question sometimes asked. 'What is the use of the I.C.S.?' It is 'What would India do without an answerable excuse for not doing anything even to the cleaning of its own streets?'



"CLOSE-UP OF A DUSTBIN

Coming down to remedy, apart from the major question of abandoning our national excuse for inactivity and acquiring, if not a civic, at least an olfactory sense, I suggest first an intensive study of an individual bin. Have your readers ever considered the contents of a Calcutta bin in gross and in detail? The contents are animal, vegetable and mineral. The animal and vegetable refuse is of course the most obnoxious. In certain areas articles of special use even more offensive to the eye are to be met with lying in the inevitable adjacent overflow.

"This brings me to the parasites subsisting upon the contents of the dustbin. Animal parasites consist of dogs, cats, rats, crows, kites and last but not least, flies. The human or sub-human parasites exceed, however, all the efforts of their animal rivals in spreading disease. It must be obvious that to extract from a dustbin or dump any particular article required involves either the throwing out of the whole contents, as is often done, or the picking over by hand with the inevitable scattering. I wonder how many realise the extent to which specialisation has been carried. Certain scavengers extract only papers. Others feathers, which now fetch a high price, presumably for pillows (one wonders if and how previously sterilised), others bones, now a highly valuable commodity; others again tins; lastly, there are those unfortunates who live directly on the contents."

If the noise one associates with Calcutta is that of hawking and spitting and the smell is that of garbage, the sight is certainly gharries. Those ramshackle contraptions that crawl about the streets throughout the day and night. A gharry can be anything, a Victoria, a phaeton, a growler, a landau, a barouche, a fiacre or something that looks like a Wild West stage coach. One thing they all look, is old. The whole turn-out looks old; the gharry, the driver



and most of all the horse. It is inconceivable that the horses could ever have been young.

The gharries do their best business when the taxis go off the roads, but the stage-coach variety, known as a bund or "brownberry," is always extensively used by Indian families because the womenfolk can be modestly and hermetically sealed inside. As many as ten people pile into and on to one of these conveyances, to be dragged along by one undernourished, limping horse. There are first, second and third-class gharries, but they are all in such a state of disrepair that there is really no difference between them. Officially, prices are low, but the drivers find ways of piling it on, and the "real money" is made at night when they go on their pimping patrols. The gharry wallah lives on his rake-off from the brothels. Wherever you go after dark, you will find yourself pursued by the clop of hooves and the creaking of wooden wheels. You will be stopped and offered the inevitable "proud college girl" and, if you should decide to hire the conveyance for the purpose of going home, you will have a hell of a time persuading the driver to take you. That was not what he meant at all. . . . This pimping has become so bad that an Army order had to be issued, forbidding all servicemen to ride in gharries after dark in the company of a female not in uniform or belonging to the forces.

When they are off duty, the gharries go to a part of the town called Entally. I have been there; it is typical Calcutta squalor and Busteland. There are merely rows and rows of broken-down stables with leaking roofs and tumbled down walls, a smell to knock you down and thousands of flies. This is where men and beasts live, sleep and eat. The horses stand drooping and apathetic or lie motionless; they do not appear to be alive and they certainly have no will to live. Entally has been the home of the stable owners for well over a hundred years and for well



over a hundred years it has been the scene of unbelievable suffering. I wondered with a sick feeling how much longer this would go on. The methods used on these horses to treat their ailments are appalling. Flesh is simply burned away with acid; and diseased bone is removed with a hammer and chisel. These animals are driven until they die on the roads, or are unable to get up in the morning. A C.S.P.C.A. (Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) does exist, but its funds are so limited and its powers so leisurely applied that nothing much is ever done. If any of these horses were seen on a road in England, it would be instantly surrounded by an indignant crowd who would probably start by lynching the driver. Here, a gharry wallah may lose his licence for drunkenness or careless driving, but cruelty only carries a small fine. There is, of course, no reason why these men should regard pain, starvation and overwork as anything to make a fuss about when their own lives are very largely a combination of all three.

At the other end of the scale from the wretched gharry horses are the sacred cattle. Five thousand of them, mostly without owners, roam the city streets and you meet them wherever you go. They poke about in the wayside bins, take passing snacks from the many food stalls and wander into shops to help themselves to what is only considered their due. They lie chewing the cud on the pavements or in the middle of busy thoroughfares, not caring a damn for the crowds milling in the streets or the traffic, and sometimes a couple of bulls go gay and have a fight in the road. Before I saw the sacred cattle of Calcutta, I used to wonder what having the freedom of a city really entailed; now I know.

The Kabuli, or moneylender, is almost as ubiquitous as the sacred cow. You see him all over India and especially in Calcutta. These tall and handsome sons of Afghanistan,



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With their gold-embroidered waistcoats, puggrees, baggy flowing trousers and thick, dangerous-looking walking sticks are Mohammedans. The occupation they follow is against their religion; moneylending is laid down as a sin. But the people of India have always found it necessary to borrow money so the Kabulis' sin is overlooked. In their own way they fulfil their calling with surprising efficiency. Their system is entirely different from ours, but for India it is very suitable.

As very few of the population can read or write, and as deeds and agreements are much too complicated for the coolie, the farmer and the artisan, the whole business of borrowing and lending is based on personal contact and, in a sense, on trust. Loans range from a few rupees to many thousands, from two per cent interest to over fifty per cent and periods of repayment vary from only a few days to several years. Security is never required for any loan. The Kabulis are psychologists, they know how far they can trust you and they charge interest according to their assessment of your trustworthiness. They themselves cannot read or write and they keep no books, but you will never find them forgetting any of their agreements and they never make a mistake. In their own way, they are honest, as honest as a shrewd business man can be. If one of their creditors defaults, they will trail him; once they have started they will never stop. If one of them wants a rest, another Kabuli will take over. There is no escape; the money lenders of India stick together and, as they are everywhere, it is quite impossible to do a flit on them. If a creditor refuses to pay even when they have caught up with him, he knows that these strong men from Afghanistan do not hesitate to use their walking sticks. There are few court cases in which Kabulis are involved; they themselves never bring actions and the defaulters would never dare to sue one of them. Much has been



argued against this system, but it works as well as any other in present-day India. The misery and desperation which are the outcome of borrowing affect a large percentage of the Indian nation, ruining its farms and destroying its homes. But the cause of all this is really adherence to the old customs ; the custom of forcing a father to pay a large dowry to marry his daughter, the custom of dividing the land between all the sons, the custom of expensive marriage ceremonies and burials. I do not think it is the Kabuli who is to blame ; he merely does the job that Indian culture requires of him.

Farther down Chowringhee, it gets more peaceful as you come into the residential quarter of the Europeans and rich Indians. Here are large houses with gravel drives, trees and flowerbeds, servants in white liveries with wide coloured belts and turbans, ayahs pushing rosy-cheeked babies in prams, and big cars with uniformed chauffeurs. The huge club buildings, surrounded by their tennis courts, have their drives full of parked cars. Indians lie on the pavement under the trees, doze over the steering-wheels of their taxis or dawdle unconcernedly along the street. This is probably the only quiet spot in the whole city ; the only area which is not grossly overpopulated. But this district takes up very little space on the map of Calcutta. A few minutes' walk or a short tram ride away from this elegant European stage set, where the white people keep themselves to themselves, the real town seethes and hums and sweats.

Only a mile from Dalhousie Square, with its large modern banks, big business houses and smart jewellers' shops, is Kumartuli, the settlement of the image makers. Here in the land of gods and demons, only just two hundred yards square, a thousand *kumbhakars* live and toil in ragged little huts and workshops. Walking in the shaded light through the narrow crooked lanes and maze of tiny shops



where their roofs almost touching, squeezing past fantastic shapes and figures, it is quite hard to distinguish the makers from the images until you go nearer and see the wonderful power and control these men have over the soft wet clay. While they work, coolies carrying masses of this bluish, sticky stuff on their heads, come up from the banks of the Hooghly where the clay barges are moored.

Even nearer to Dalhousie Square and Central Avenue is China Town ; another world on its own, as complete and individual as Kumartuli. Once you begin to wander through the little byways and alleys, there is nothing to remind you that you are in India. This is a corner of China ; rather old fashioned China, though, for the younger and more go ahead inhabitants are to be found in the newly built blocks of flats which stand at each side of the wide roads on the edge of the Chinese quarter. But in the winding streets, only just wide enough for a rickshaw to pass, the people are just the way you would expect them to be. You see frail, opium-smoking, shadow men, slender women in flowered, silken coats and mummified grandfathers with stringy mandarin beards, sitting on the doorsteps and blinking like cats in the sun.

Almost every little two-storied house is a shop or restaurant advertising itself with a large, vertical sign in scarlet with gold and white characters. There are temples with golden dragons, prayer flags, lanterns and the sweet smell of incense. There is a Chinese-Jewish synagogue with a Chinese rabbi chanting Hebrew prayers. There are opium dens with the officially licensed addicts smoking their daily quota of poison. There are brothels more sordid than any to be found in the East, which is saying a lot. There is a bit of everything in old China Town, and everything, however insignificant, looks busy and purposeful and has a peculiar intimacy and self-sufficient life of its own. You see it even in the way they eat with their chop-



stems, sitting at the neatly laid tables in the little restaurants, or in the quietly passionate way they play cards, with the money or chips changing hands all the time.

The cafés and workshops are open until well past midnight and there is always plenty going on after dark. You constantly meet happy families, laughing and joking among themselves, on their way home from an outing. The Chinese are gay, sociable people and they love parties. Whenever they go out, which is very often, the women dress up in charming simple frocks, the children are put into their Sunday best and the men wear immaculate white slacks and shirts.

But what makes this place unique in Calcutta, is the everyday life once school hours are over. Then China Town is suddenly filled with children. It is dominated by them. All of them are neat and well fed; it is easy to see how well they are looked after. Obviously it is children first in the Chinese community. Most of them, the boys and the girls, are dressed in a kind of scout uniform of khaki drill. To see these charming healthy young Chinese marching to their schools or to the gymnastic grounds where they do their exercises, is a wonderful antidote for that Far Eastern Hangover one gets from the seemingly hopeless ignorance and filth of one's everyday contacts and surroundings. The Chinese have their own schools which every child attends. They have their own clubs and welfare organisations. They have not allowed India to get them down.

This solicitude for the younger generation has produced results which can be seen all over the European part of Calcutta. For instance, the Chinese are the owners of many of the best shops; they are more expensive than the Indians, but you can trust their workmanship. The best restaurants are theirs; all of them are "In Bounds" for the troops because they are clean, and you can be sure of



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food. Some of the most prominent business men and the most cultured citizens are Chinese. The Chinese in Calcutta are typical of their race; they know how to make homes and careers they can be proud of, no matter where they are or what their surroundings.

All the children in Calcutta, whether they are Chinese, Indian or Anglo-Indian, fly kites. Whenever you look up you will see diamond-shaped, fishtailed kites racing through the sky. This is not just a game as it is in other countries, when these little boys grow up they will go in for serious kite-fighting, which often becomes their lifelong passion and sport. They will compete in nation-wide tournaments, will be watched by thousands of spectators, and lakhs of rupees will be wagered on them. Kite-fighting may even become their profession. The fighting part of the kite is the coloured thread which is coated with finely ground glass and which is sharp enough to decapitate a bird flying through the air. By manipulating and playing out the kite, the flier manœuvres it into the right position to cut his opponent's thread. The idea is for one flier to get his kite to windward of his opponent's and then let his cord drift against the other's. Much time is spent jockeying for position and the winner is the one whose kite remains attached to the thread while the others sail off into the blue. At a proper tournament, each fighter has as many as eleven assistants who hold the razor-sharp reels of thread and shout advice and encouragement. All the gamblers and spectators hop about in wild excitement and only the fliers look calm. Their eyes are fixed on the sky, they are a perfect picture of concentration.

Using Dalhousie Square again as a starting-off point, you are within a minute of the Chitpore Road, one of the busiest and certainly the most fascinating street in Calcutta. There are almost three miles of open bazaars and stalls, and the road is packed with bullock-carts, handcarts,



ramshackle buses, rickshaws, aged trams, sacred cattle, herds of sheep and goats, and swarms and swarms of jostling people who have overflowed from the footpath. Some lie on the pavement fast asleep, while others squat on the curb to make water; everyone chews betel nut and spits in all directions. It is dirty underfoot with rotten food and droppings and the air is heavy with a thick stench. Everyone eats in the streets, buying their snacks from the little portable tables laden with sliced melons, sugar cane, bananas, sweets and fatty cakes. Over each table hovers a swarm of flies, ready to dive on to the food whenever there is a chance. There are open kitchens, built entirely of clay, with the cook squatting among the rice, dahl and cereals, frying on the open charcoal fires. The food is handed out on a leaf or rolled in chappaty and eaten on the spot. Some of the stalls serve char in little thin earthenware cups which are emptied and then thrown on the pavement where they are crushed under the thousands of passing feet. Green coconuts are also sold for an anna a nut; the top is cut off and the cool liquid gulped down on the spot. The big green shell is then tossed into the road. In the cigarette bazaars whole schools of boys sit cross-legged filling little green leaves with cut tobacco, then with incredible speed, they tie up the ends with a thin twine. These paperless, leaf cigarettes are cheap and are the ones most usually smoked by the Indians. The commonest street trade is betel; and every sidewalk and every wall is stained with its blood-red juice. All India chews it; one-tenth of the world chews paan. The paan wallah sits on his stall surrounded by small green leaves and a selection of shining brass pots and trays. He takes a dash of chuna (a slaked white lime mixture) out of one bowl and paints it on a leaf, then a touch of katha (a chocolate-coloured mixture) is smeared on top and then a few fragments of supari (a grated palm nut) are placed on the



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prepared leaf. The leaf is then folded, chewed and spat out as red juice. There are many variations in the preparation of these leaves ; it is considered to be a great art. Chewing is as habitual to the Indian as smoking—only it is much more popular for it is part of his tradition. Betel has no narcotic properties and no ill effect except for blackening the teeth. It has a peculiar taste rather like a very anti-septic toothpaste.

If you want a shave, a haircut or a massage, you just squat down on the pavement and let one of the numerous barbers get on with it. If you should happen to be a little hard of hearing, there are professional ear-cleaners with all sorts of weird, home-made instruments. Sitting on the pavement in the midst of all the bustle, they perform the most delicate operations, and it only costs two annas an ear.

The jewellers, the shoemakers, the hosiers, the instrument makers, the stone-masons, the medicine merchants and the fortune tellers all have their shops in little clusters in one particular part of the street. Most of these bazaars consist of one large room open to the pavement and here everything is manufactured, repaired and sold in full view. In front of many of them, such as watchmakers and instrument makers, there is always a crowd idly watching the artisans at work.

The biggest crowd of all is in front of the jewellers. Silver and gold has a mysterious fascination for the poorer Indians and they will waste hours watching a transaction taking place. For every customer, there are at least ten onlookers and if you want to get into the jeweller's you will have to fight your way through. The shop is divided by a thick iron grating that runs right up to the ceiling. Behind this the jeweller reclines luxuriously on a wide low couch, covered with white linen and taking up at least half the floor space. At his back are thick bolsters and



front of him is a small weighing machine. All the jewellery is bought and sold by weight; the value has little to do with the workmanship. Shelves against the wall are stacked with gold and silver belts, huge ear-rings, ornaments which cover the whole hand and are fixed with five rings on each finger and a bracelet round the wrist, thick serpentine anklets and armlets which have to be bent open to put on, elaborate head ornaments, huge rings and wide bracelets and necklaces decorated with hundreds of tiny bells. Everything is either gold or silver and the workmanship is crude, but the designs have a simple strength which is very effective. As long as the Indian goldsmiths and silversmiths stick to their traditional designs, the results are original and often beautiful, but as soon as they begin to imitate western ideas, the results are disastrous and ten times more hideous than anything we ever manage to produce. In the European part of Calcutta these bastard products are the only things one can buy. Jewellery is bought by the Indian not so much as an ornament but as a means of saving. Banks and investments are much too complicated for him, so he saves by loading his wife with gold and silver. The more she is adorned, the more substantial is his status in his caste or creed.

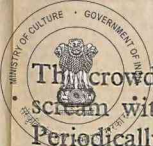
By far the most exciting shops on the Chitpore Road are the ones which sell medicine, run by the quack doctors and nature healers. There is no disease for which you cannot buy a hocus-pocus remedy and a guaranteed cure. All along the shelves and tables are cobwebby glass jars containing embryo alligators, dogs' livers, lions' teeth and unidentifiable pieces of decomposed flesh which can be anything that the medicine man happens to want to sell his patient. If you have a troublesome fever—and any illness can be a fever—a lion's heart is what you require (provided you can afford this luxury). Mix it with a pound of cow dung, stir in a pint of cow urine, eat it when the full



moon is up and Bob's your uncle. Cow dung and cow urine are holy and therefore universal healers. Salamanders in all forms, fried, boiled or powdered are a sovereign remedy, to say nothing of the hundreds of herbs you can buy to cure you of any complaint, however distressing.

The other group of super-charlatans are the astrologers and palmists who sell you talismans and lucky charms for anything up to three hundred rupees—if you are fool enough to fork out. They will also foretell your future in a hundred different ways; you can then take your pick of a hundred different futures. Each sitting can cost you as much as two thousand rupees, but if you argue long enough you will probably get it for two. Calcutta is crawling with these psychic characters who squat on the roadside and in the bazaars. Judging by their fat paunches, most of them appear to make a comfortable living out of their credulous coolie clients. But it is always like that in India; the superstitious and ignorant get had every time, while the sly and half-educated cash in and do very nicely.

If Chitpore Road has given you a taste for crowds, you have only to go back to Chauringhee and continue along it for about three miles until you come to Kalighat where the Kali temple stands. This is the most important in Calcutta. Surrounding the whole temple area are little stores selling offerings: images, religious toys, cheap bracelets, food and flowers. You can also buy live kids, as the best way to placate the Goddess Kali is with a blood sacrifice. The place is always swarming with pilgrims who have come from all over Bengal, and there is a perpetual pushing and shoving to get near the image. She is a wild-looking creature, with her lustful red tongue hanging out, her necklace of decapitated heads and the blood dripping from her hands. She is covered with flowers which the worshippers keep handing to the priests and at her feet is a large bowl into which everyone, who can get near enough, throws coins



The crowd sways and murmurs, women faint and children scream with fear as they are almost crushed in the press. Periodically, the priests plunge in among the people and force a gap so that the women and children who have been unable to get near the goddess may catch a glimpse of her. They sigh with pleasure, throw flowers and coins and hold the children up to be blessed.

Kalighat, like every other district, has its brothel area in the same way that every London borough had its park or recreation ground. This one near the temple is typical of most of the others; the narrow, murky streets, the barred or shuttered windows and the bare cubicles with only a mat or a bundle of rags on the floor, waiting for the customers that the pimp or husband brings in. In these alleys, one sees humanity literally decaying under one's eyes. The great difficulty is to keep oneself from being sick.

Before the war, in the European quarter, there used to be a certain Karia Road where high-class establishments were to be found. There, women of all nationalities, most of them white or Anglo, held court; an evening's entertainment would cost upwards of £7. Then, as the war got nearer, and Calcutta began to be called "The Paris behind the Burma Front," all the brothels were raided and closed down. Most of the ladies decamped to the Hill Stations which became more and more popular as the war went on. Others did not go so far afield, but regrouped themselves in and around Ripon Street, the centre of the drab Anglo-Indian quarter.

Once, this must have been a very charming district with small elegant colonial houses built around tiny courtyards and surrounded by little gardens. But now the whole place looks as bad as it smells. The air is rancid with frying, and the plaster is peeling off the houses in big slabs. Only here and there you still catch sight of the former bright orange yellow that used to brighten the streets. There



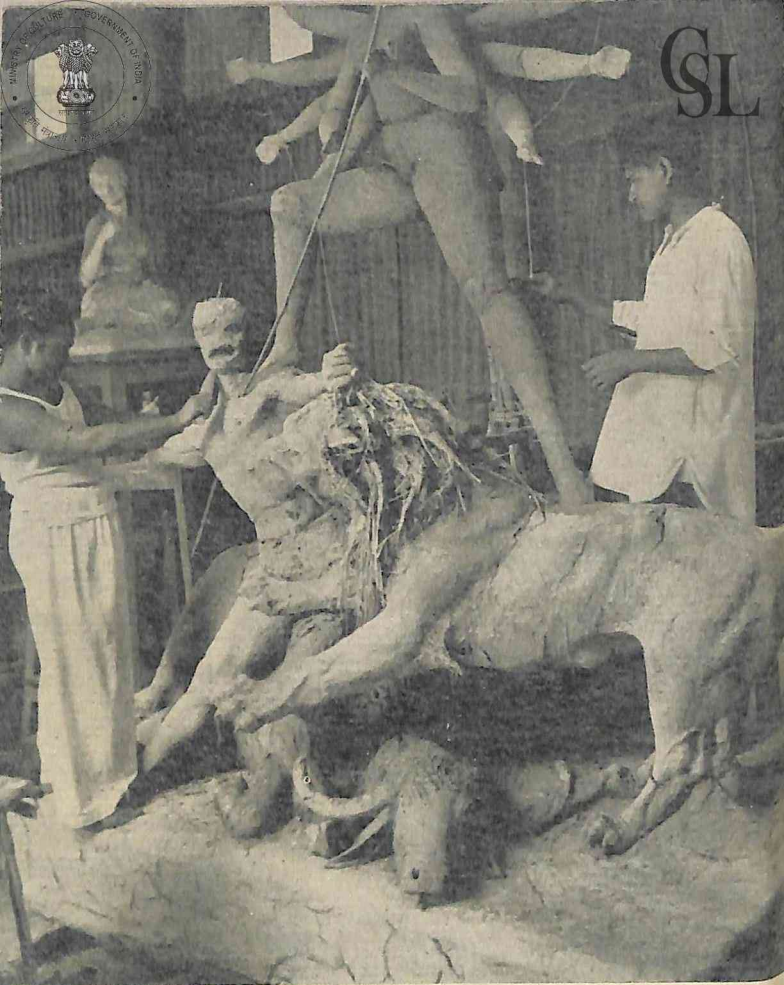
garbage heaps in the roads where the rats squeak and rustle as soon as it gets dark. There are no more flowers and bushes in the gardens, only heaps of discarded clothing and old pots and pans. Haggard Anglo-Indian women in dirty aprons, slop about with children trailing after them. Poor Indians live here as well and their naked children play in the gutter. The smell of greasy food rises from the many open cooking stalls along the pavement. At night Ripon Street is busier than during the day. Gharries, rickshaws and taxis arrive with the customers, who are mostly in uniform. In the courtyards, radiograms are turned on full blast but they do not entirely drown the penetrating shrieks and giggles of the Anglo-Indian girls, the drunken voices of soldiers, the babble of American, British and Chi-Chi accents. There is dancing, there is quarrelling and avalanches of the choicest abuse I have ever heard anywhere by tipsy Anglo women. Jeeps are parked in the dark courtyards, shadows sneak from house to house, taxi drivers are shouted at, someone is sick against a wall. . . . One wonders if it was a good thing to close Karia Road.

Perhaps the largest brothel area in Calcutta lies between the Chitpore Road and Central Avenue. It is called Sanagatchi and occupies quite a chunk of the town. There are high-class streets, with pretty, beautifully dressed girls who occupy fairly clean and moderately well-furnished rooms, and again there are the grim little alleys smelling of human excretia, where everything is squalid and diseased.

But it was not these places which interested me when I went on a tour of inspection with an Anglo-Indian police inspector. I had seen them too often before; all over Calcutta, all over India. What fascinated me were the large, well-kept, irreproachable-looking buildings, just on the fringe of Sanagatchi. My guide told me that we could also inspect these houses if we wanted to, but there was



He shapes the body and limbs by means of the straw tightly tied together.



The goddess Durga is the personification of creative energy ; ten armed, she stands on a lion and subdues her foes.

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really no need as they were so very respectable. We inspected all the same. We were let in by an elderly Indian woman, with much dignity and self-assurance. She showed us round and introduced us to some of her twenty girls. They were very pretty and dressed in the most exquisite transparent silken saris with a great deal of beautiful and valuable jewellery. Each one of them occupied her own room, luxuriously furnished with deep carpets and a wide, thickly bolstered couch. They sat primly and giggled in an assinine way when we looked in with Madame. This woman is entirely responsible for the girls; she feeds them, dresses them and sees that they are clean and healthy. She provides them with their room and it is also up to her to see that they are faithful. Faithful to their rich Babu lovers who pay her 150 rupees per month for the upkeep of their mistresses. The girls just sit and wait day in, day out until their lover feels disposed to visit them. Sometimes he may not turn up for weeks; he might be away on business, ill or perhaps favouring another lady whom he keeps at a different establishment. But the girl has no choice but to sit and wait for him. There she is; useless, brainless but always ready, like a car parked in a garage until its owner is in need of it and starts the engine.

There is no greater contrast to Sanagatchi than the many middle-class settlements which are to be found all over the town. In the middle of the noise and bustle, you suddenly come on one of these which might almost be in the country, it looks so peaceful and serene. The large tank is surrounded with palm trees that reflect in its still shiny surface, thick green grass is growing on the banks and ducks swim about on the water. Fairly wide streets converge on the tank, and the two-storied houses are modern. There is plenty of shade from the trees, and flowers and bushes grow in the little, well-tended gardens. All round you is an atmosphere of intimacy and happiness.



The most charming Indian families live in these settlements; many of them are exceedingly cultured and progressive. Like the young Indian who was an accountant in our office, at whose house I had many meals on the polished red cement floor. We had almost identical views about politics, but he was a good Indian and Hindu. Naturally, he wanted self-government, but he and his friends were not averse to our staying in India. They loved European music and painting and English literature, and had a wonderful collection of gramophone records, books and reproductions. I imagine most of the money they earned must have been spent on these hobbies.

Then there were the two elderly widows and their large families, in whose house I spent a lot of time. Both these ladies had been married to doctors and when they became widows, they continued to live their own full and useful lives, in direct contradiction of all Indian customs, beliefs and traditions. They refused to bury themselves alive in their homes; on the contrary, they began to work energetically for all forms of enlightenment and especially for the good of India's young girls. They preached against the cruel custom of widowhood, they began to teach, started girls' schools and persuaded parents to educate their daughters. They wrote educational articles for the local papers, sent petitions to the council and organised food and clothing distribution. They were the kind of women that India needs so badly, and they were graceful and charming at the same time. Life in their house was pleasant, yet very Indian. There was the religious shrine with its little images and symbols always decorated with flowers and fruits and with incense constantly smouldering. On festival days a Brahmin said prayers and the family joined him from time to time. But there was no fanaticism about it, only a sober religious belief and a following of the old customs where they did not interfere with a useful productive



Two families lived in this house, and the men and women ate together. Apart from the two old ladies, these people were a bit timid and rather reserved, but, even by western standards, they were perfectly normal together. During some of the evenings I spent there, some of the girls would play musical instruments, or sometimes they would rehearse plays, but mostly we just talked.

We were able to discuss almost any topic quite coolly and objectively, although some of the members of the household had actually been in prison for their political activities. But although they were determined on self-government, this had not made them vindictive and they admitted their own shortcomings and fully realised that they would need our help if they were to build the India they wanted. The future of Calcutta, and the whole of India, is to be found in these unpretentious middle-class homes. It is certainly not in the palaces of the fabulously rich merchants and landowners, nor in the slums and bustees of the ignorant poor; least of all is it in the comfortable flats of those super-intellectuals who talk and talk and talk.

Calcutta is desperately in need of a future, for it is a city which the West has cultivated and forced into growth and expansion, without any thought beyond the immediate present. The right hand has never concerned itself with what the left hand was doing. And so you get several thousand white people living and minding their own prosperous European business, quite impervious to the million or so lives of the rest of the community. I have sometimes walked for days through the Indian parts of the town without ever meeting a single white man. No wonder then, that this is a city of contrasts. These contrasts may make it the most fascinating place in the world, but one cannot help feeling that they are a reflection on those who, quite complacently, allow them to continue. This is the place where you will find incredible riches living beside poverty that



You couldn't have thought possible. This is the place for Arabian Nights palaces, yet over half the population has to sleep on the streets while most of the other half must make do with murky, windowless hovels.

You can live very well in Calcutta; whoever you are, if you want to, you can lead the life of a gentleman. You can have servants, large cool houses, clubs, swimming pools, parties, air-conditioned cinemas, horse racing, pleasant walks in the botanical gardens and sailing on the wide river. But if you happen to be someone who is interested in other people, you will never be happy or at peace for a moment. You will never get used to the fact that just one street from your home, a family of ten is crammed into one tiny room, that just underneath your window a half-starved mother with her child is sleeping on the hard pavement, that almost one million of your fellow-inhabitants are hungry right now and that over a million of them never have sufficient to eat. The sight of the beggars, the crippled and the diseased lining the streets will continue to shock you; you will be shocked a hundred times a day. You will never get used to it; no one ever should get used to Calcutta.



EDUCATION

It is surprising how little our civilisation has touched the educated Indians. Surprising because, in order to become educated, they have accepted our learning and our science. And yet, apart from adopting the use of medicine and electricity, motor cars and aeroplanes, their knowledge has hardly affected the customs they have been following for centuries.

Although they know the principles of hygiene, they have no real conception of sanitation and cleanliness. They still cling to much of the mumbo-jumbo of ancient remedies and refuse to use paper or anything except their left hand, which they afterwards wash in water only, when going to the lavatory. They still dress the same, eat the same, think the same.

In some ways, of course, it is admirable that they have been influenced so little and clung so stubbornly to their individuality. There would be no sense in copying our way of living for the sake of copying it. But there are certain aspects of our civilisation from which they could derive nothing but good. It has been argued that the Indian brain is physically incapable of absorbing western ideas, but I cannot see that there is any basis for this theory. There seems to be no doubt at all that, given the chance and the right conditions, they are perfectly capable of absorbing any amount of knowledge, and turning it to practical account—if *they want to*. There must be some other reason for their consistent refusal to make use of the goods which we deliver and they accept. In actual



for there are several reasons for this contradictory state of affairs. Each one bears directly on the problem of education.

The first and most striking is religion. As the modern western world has developed, education and science—which have become synonymous—have repeatedly clashed with religion until all three found a new working formula. The Indian religions, besides having an absolute hold on the population, are also much farther removed from progress than their western counterparts. Therefore the clash is bound to be correspondingly sharper. And the educated Indian still falters and stops when the practical results of his learning get in the way of his faith.

The Hindu knows that the millions of cows roaming about suck the nourishment from the countryside like leeches. He knows that the only thing to do would be to destroy the old, diseased and unproductive beasts to enable the others to get enough food. But the cow is holy and killing is a sin. As a result, man and beast suffer. The Mohammedan knows that it is unnatural to keep his women in purdah, without fresh air and almost suffocating in the heat. But this practice has become part of his religion and he dare not interfere. Both he and the Hindu know about the terrible results of child marriage, but this too is part of their religion. They know the awful cruelty of forbidding widows to marry again, yet the widow continues to be an outcast; forced to be the slave of her in-laws or to go into prostitution. They know, they even admit, that their constant festivals and processions are an appalling waste of energy and time, as is their overall preoccupation with prayer and those twin bogeys, the Life that Was and the Life to Come. They acknowledge the absurdity of their thousands of gods. And they are fully aware of the incalculable harm which the worst of all their practices, the caste system, has done to their country.



And yet, in spite of all the weapons their education and enlightenment have put into their hands, they do not dare to make an open stand against the destructive forces of their religion. I have met many Indians who do personally live by what they have learned, but I know of hardly any who were willing to take the final step. Knowledge for themselves is one thing; knowledge for the masses can only result in unbelief for the masses and they will have no part in it. A people without education is, admittedly, a pity, but a people without faith is a sin.

So the vicious circle goes on. And there is obviously no solution until there are enough genuinely sincere educated Hindus and Mohammedans to achieve collective security. Then perhaps they will speak up for the cause of enlightenment. Until then education in India will serve no really practical purpose.

Another obstacle is the shocking academic snobbery of the Indian upper classes. Their love of degrees for degrees' sake. They will swot and cram not so much because they want to get a thorough working knowledge of their subject, but because they want the maximum number of letters after their names. Whenever an Indian introduces a young man to you, he will add "B.A.," "M.A.," or "B.Sc.," If he happens to speak of a friend, he will seldom fail to mention any degrees he has taken. Knowledge, as a precious and productive possession, matters little; what matters is that mystic B.A. That is the operative thing and that must be achieved at all costs.

Undoubtedly, the Indian's greatest talent is his ability to learn by heart. It seems quite fantastic, but it nevertheless happens, that a student will learn a whole text book and repeat it verbatim in an examination. For this reason, provided he spends enough time memorising, he can pass any exam, unless a question on which he has no notes or which has not been touched on in his text books crops up.



When he will be utterly lost ; lost because he has only half understood what he has been studying, because his approach to his work has been that of a parrot and he has wasted his time getting it off by heart and lost because his subject is probably miles removed from the reality of his own life, so that it is impossible for him to improvise. And if he finds himself in this position while sitting for an exam., he will go on strike and walk out, along with any others who feel they have been cheated by the unexpected question. This is an everyday occurrence at many of the Indian universities. On the whole, however, the majority of students work hard and well, and are far more serious than most Europeans.

Once the average Indian has his degree, he is satisfied. He gets a tremendous kick out of sitting up till all hours deeply involved in highly intellectual conversation with other academic friends. That is his idea of being civilised. He has, however, no desire to share his knowledge by passing it on to the ignorant and less fortunate sections of the community, for they are beneath his contempt. And so he will not accept a job that is likely to take him among these sort of people. The fact that his knowledge may be desperately needed in out-of-the-way places is no concern of his. He is concerned with his own ambition and with externals. He honestly considers that his degree gives him a right to personal comfort ; the right to become a high civil servant or a doctor or a lawyer in a big Europeanised town. It is also the passport to a professorship at one of the universities, for he has no objection to educating those who are already educated. But his privileges must be safeguarded at all costs. He has earned them and he is exceedingly proud of them. That learning by itself is nothing to buck about, is something he will never understand.

It is not surprising that the majority of these ambitious young men fail to become the doctors, lawyers and professors



than they had hoped to be. When this happens, they much prefer to waste their education in an underpaid clerical job or sit about as unemployed waiting for something made-to-measure to come along.

Far too few students study engineering, agriculture and the more practical subjects, for these do not carry the same prestige as the learned professions. They sound too much like ordinary work. Manual work, however skilled—with the exception of surgery—carries a definite stigma. I told some of my Indian acquaintances how a friend of mine, a senior research fellow at Oxford, sweeps and washes his own laboratory every day. This is the one way to ensure that no outside influences are interfering with his experiments. When I told them that he spends much of his time feeding animals and cleaning out their cages, I do not think they believed me. I tried to explain that my friend considers it his duty to do menial work of this kind. But to them that wasn't the point; menial work is for a coolie not a scientist. My friend was simply asking for trouble, doing something so unbecoming and so entirely outside his province.

But the problem of the educated Indian is a mere flea-bite when set beside that of the illiterate masses. Not only because the latter outnumber him by about nineteen to one, but also because their problem is even farther from solution than his. Progress during the last hundred years has been virtually nil. The cause of this is partly due to the shortcomings of the educated few already mentioned, and partly to certain more immediate factors.

For instance, the pay of a village school teacher is not more than sixty rupees a month, and a headmaster cannot expect more than a hundred. I myself as a glider pilot sergeant received 320 rupees with all living expenses free. Our bearers got forty to sixty rupees plus presents and tips, which must have brought their income up to well above



that of a village headmaster. There is, therefore, little incentive for a young man to go out and spread the word, unless he has far more sincerity than ambition. And sincerity in India is, and always has been, at a premium. In view of this, the obvious thing to do would be to make the elementary teaching profession more attractive.

Ninety per cent of our elementary teaching has always been done by women. But in India this would not be considered an honourable profession for an educated woman. Assuming she were emancipated enough to waive tradition and ignore the prejudice against working, she would immediately be up against another set of difficulties: (1) If a woman is not married by the time she is eighteen, she is considered inferior. (2) If she were to live alone in a village, she would automatically be regarded as a loose woman. Indians have repeatedly told me, when arguing on the subject, that no young woman alone in a village would be able to defend herself from seduction and rape. This gives rise to difficulty number (3). No man will marry a girl who has not been carefully guarded by her parents until the moment of her marriage. So the female teacher would, *ipso facto*, have to give up all hope of finding a husband.

But perhaps the greatest share of the blame for the ignorance of the Indian masses should be handed to us. To our own teaching system which we transferred to India lock, stock and barrel. The attitude of the educated Indian is, after all, largely the result of what we have taught him. We have subjected him to a process evolved by ourselves to fit our own people for our way of life. The native student in India learns exactly what the white student learns in England. No account seems to be taken for their fundamental differences in temperament, environment, way of life and, above all, the wide gap between them in human development.



Much of the Indian's mental energy is wasted in learning a difficult foreign language that is in no way allied to his own. This is even the case in the village schools, as most of the elementary, as well as all the secondary and higher text books, are printed in English.

The average small English boy is a practical creature with a naturally technical turn of mind. He can be trusted to find out for himself about the workings of such everyday contrivances as the steam engine, the motor car, the wireless and the electric light. By the time he is ten or so, he could probably give you more information about these than most adult Indians who have received a secondary education. What is more, he will almost certainly be handier in the house, garden and workshop. As the Indian possesses no natural practical bent, this sort of workaday knowledge should, from the word go, form a very large part of his curriculum. That it does not, puts him at a terrible disadvantage.

Not nearly enough attention has been given to the possibilities of improving the young Indian's health and physique. The poor student is lazy and under-developed as the result of climate and under-feeding, while over-feeding and ridiculous pampering make the rich boy lazy and soft. Sport and physical culture would help them both, for they both need the toughness and strength that come from playing a game like rugger, and the independence and quick eye that are developed from boxing.

Much of what we do teach the Indian is almost laughable—if it weren't so tragic—when it is looked at against his background. It might be argued that the time he spends on English history and literature is not wasted because they provide him with a comparison to, and perspective on, his own civilisation. But the two are so utterly different that there just isn't any point at which you can start comparing them. The more one looks at it the more one is forced to



the unpleasant conclusion that we educate the Indian to our own ends, so that he may be useful to us rather than to his native land.

I am sure, however, that if a sufficient number of Indians had pocketed their private differences and got together, they could have evolved a more practical and suitable system of education. Had it been workable, the British Raj would certainly have raised no objections. Probably thousands of theorists have talked about it, but as usual no one has done anything ; with one or two isolated exceptions.

I was lucky enough to get a look at one of these, which impressed me most favourably, when I spent one of my weekend leaves at Santiniketan. The Abode of Peace was planned and created by Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet and philosopher. He started it as a school and helped it to grow into a university of over five hundred students. The entire teaching policy still follows his original ideas. Santiniketan is co-educational ; it provides an outdoor life and games ; it teaches community spirit and complete equality without regard to religion or caste. There is practical instruction in agriculture, training in handicraft, a comprehensive study of all the arts and anything foreign or native which can bring beauty, happiness and practical enlightenment to the Indian way of life. A real attempt is made to produce a good citizen. With its model farm, workshops, theatre, laboratories, lecture halls, dormitories, sportsgrounds, art studios and its nearby adopted village, it is almost an entirely self-sufficient unit. Here, in healthy surroundings, the young Indian can learn how to live fully ; to share in a community larger than his own family, to plough the land, to build huts, to drive a tractor. He can learn it all, right up the scale, to sculpture, higher mathematics and philosophy. At Santiniketan, I saw for the first time how India can be educated in her own way for her own good. It needed a practical idealist of genius to



stand this experiment and make a success of it. I am sure that more and more idealists will graduate from the Abode of Peace. And they at least will be properly equipped to hack the path towards genuine enlightenment in India.



THE LANGUAGE OF THE SOUL

ONE of the main reasons why the Indian's feet are not sufficiently on the ground, is that his head is above the clouds. Just how far above the clouds becomes only too apparent the moment you begin to try and ascend to his intellectual level. With his highly developed sense of beauty and his deep, innate mysticism, the Indian looks upon the arts as a key to the closer study of the soul. The soul is the pivot around which his thoughts eternally revolve ; art is one of the soul's most important manifestations. And so he approaches all art forms with a reverence and concentration which is apt to irritate you and give you a false impression. Unless you constantly remind yourself of the reasons for his attitude when discussing artistic matters, you are liable to think he is sentimentalising and "acting highbrow."

The educated Indian's artistic outlook is completely international and without prejudice. The language of the soul fascinates him wherever it is spoken. Anything that will enable him to understand and appreciate it more fully, he studies with meticulous care ; here, of course, his remarkable memory is invaluable to him. The uninformed art-lover, who muddles along enjoying himself at picture galleries, the theatre, ballet, concerts, French films and at home "with a good book," should beware of broaching the subject of the arts in Indian company. He will immediately draw upon himself a withering fire of erudition, and within five minutes will be floundering miles out of his depth. His only line of retreat will be to adopt the policy of Yes-Man and hope for the best.



With my lack of specialised knowledge, I realised that I should not be able to learn much about the native arts from talking to the natives. Such discussions as I did have were not at all productive; all I could do was to listen while the conversation soared farther and farther above my head. It was clear that I should have to explore Indian art when and where I could, from my own level.

Even though my opportunities for seeing it were very limited, the native dancing impressed me more than any other art form in India. There is a certainty, a completeness, about it quite apart from its individuality, that makes it stand alone. Really good dancing is only available to the outsider in the big cities, and then at a prohibitive price; one seat might easily cost you £3. There is no other way of seeing it unless you are lucky enough to get an invitation to a recital at a private house. Sometimes good dancing does take place in villages, but almost always only by special arrangement to celebrate some particular occasion. Here again, an invitation would be necessary.

At these private performances, one or two of which I managed to see, there were no men dancers; just beautiful girls. Their dances, although precise and skilful, were mostly very suggestive and obviously designed to play upon the senses of the all male audience. These girls were dancers of the Devadasi school. The Dasis belong to the Hindu temples; it is their sacred function to dance in the honour of the gods and be enjoyed by the Brahmins and worshippers. Traditionally, the Dasi is a divine-human; she is the bride of the gods, but may have children by mortals. The most pleasant aspect of her life is that she can never become a widow, which is the worst fate that can befall an Indian woman.

It is only comparatively recently that dancing has broken away from its strictly religious ties and begun to be practised by men and women as an art in itself. Now that it



is beginning to be regarded as an honourable profession, not so generally associated with prostitution, the range of expression is becoming far wider. Much of the ritual and formal sensuality is disappearing, and age-old basic dance forms are being explored and revived by the new choreographers. Wealthy and educated Indians are sending their sons and daughters to dancing schools. The result is that there are now a considerable number of really first-class dancers of both sexes. These men and women look upon their art in the same idealistic and professional way that the best ballet dancers do in the West. I admire Ram Gopal tremendously, but I have seen several men, who have not as yet performed outside India, who are at least as good if not better than he is.

To enjoy Indian dancing, you do not need to possess any specialised knowledge. You do not even have to be able to differentiate between its hundred and one local and regional variations, nor is it necessary to understand the significance of the thousands of traditional hand movements and poses, each of which has a definite meaning. I have seen British soldiers and American G.I.'s, who never saw any dancing in their lives outside the movies, utterly absorbed and completely carried away by what they saw at a public performance in Calcutta. But the effect on English balletomanes was exactly the same.

Indian dancing hits you and envelopes you at the same time. No other dancing that I have ever seen is as full and rich and dynamic. Every movement is a definite statement; strong, precise and often grotesque. Discipline and motive power are combined in such a way that there is nothing which cannot be expressed. As you watch, the enigma of the Indian mind and its mystical aspirations is explained before your eyes. You see the human body as a prison, convulsed by the power and energy of the soul as it struggles to find a way out into the light. Only when a dancer is



*Drums are the oldest instruments ; rhythm is second only
to the tune in importance.*

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Before the Kumbharka starts on his image he makes a miniature model, accurate in all proportions.

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representing a god are his movements harmonious and beautiful, for then he is interpreting the soul triumphant, the ultimate achievement of what he understands by the meaning of life. Comedy also has its place in the Indian dance, because comedy is an integral part of the life of both man and god. This lighter dancing is usually performed by girls, though sometimes by both sexes. The more dramatic subjects are mostly danced by men.

There seemed to me to be no aspect of Indian dancing that was not completely satisfying. The way in which it reveals the Indian character makes it, for me anyway, by far the most impressive and instructive of the arts in India today.

Certainly far more instructive than any contemporary writings I have come across, with the exception of Tagore (if he can be called contemporary). Anything one reads obviously suffers the great disadvantage of being translated or written in English; but even allowing for this, such writings as I have read struck me as being self-conscious and without any real strength. I was quite unable to link them up with India in the way that I could the dancing. This may, of course, have been a fault in myself, although I found translated classics like the *Gita* most beautiful and revealing.

Most modern sculpture that I saw, at Art Schools and Universities like Santiniketan, did not impress me either. It, too, has a weakness about it and does not appear to have anything very definite of its own. The wonderful strength and sense of movement in the old Hindu sculpture, from which most of this modern stuff is copied, are completely lacking. But then there is such a wealth of exciting antique carving to be found all over India, that one tends not to spend much time or thought on the new.

Painting, on the other hand, is far more alive; the modern Indian painters really do seem to be intent on breaking



away from tradition and finding new modes of expression. For this reason I was often interested although I was never actually bowled over by anything I saw. The work of one man, however, I did find tremendously decorative and pleasing. This was Jamini Roy, the very successful Bengal artist.

Jamini Roy started in Calcutta as a painter in the European tradition. Then, dissatisfied with his work, he retired to his village in Bengal in an attempt to recapture the native art forms he had lost and of which he now felt himself in need. When he returned to Calcutta, he had evolved the idiom in which he has been painting ever since. His colours are exciting and his balance and design are both strong and graceful, but there is a flatness and facile feeling about his pictures that gives them—delightful though they undoubtedly are—a mass-produced look. I was struck by this the first time I saw them, before I had visited his studio behind Calcutta's Baghbazaar and discovered that he turns out several pictures a day. He has become exceedingly fashionable and is able to sell everything he paints. His best customers recently have been the English and the American soldiers, who find in the vivid colours and strong, simple outlines of his pictures something really attractive to take home with them; something Indian, modern and understandable.

Of all the arts in India, it is their music that baffles the white man most completely. His understanding boggles and then shies away when he attempts to make head or tail of that agonising jumble of screechings and wailings and scrapings that goes by the name of Indian Music. But it most certainly is music to the Indians.

All over the country, the coolies hum their ancient tunes. As they work in the fields, they sing the songs their forefathers sang hundreds of years ago. And in the big towns, crowds stand rapt and silent in front of the



witness shops, listening and listening. In the evenings, those strange sounds can be heard coming from many houses. Through the shutters you can see a musician and a singer, surrounded by a circle of white-clad figures who crouch there motionless and fascinated.

These people love their music ; we not only cannot love it, we can hardly bear to listen to it. This perfect example of "one man's meat" intrigued me. I wanted to know why it was that I could derive pleasure from, or at least understand, all their other art forms with the exception of this one. I wanted to discover my blind, or rather deaf, spot. Obviously it was no good examining myself ; the only thing to do was to examine the music. Somewhere in this alien arrangement of sounds, I was convinced I should find the answer. If my understanding could get the hang of the theory, I thought it might give my ears a better chance with the practice. Our ears cannot cope with Indian music because it is arranged so entirely differently from our own. They cannot sort out the unfamiliar and constantly changing rhythms, the micro-notes and grace notes, and are unable to pass them on in an orderly manner to our brain. What does reach our brain is a long drawn out wailing noise, like a gramophone record being played backwards.

This music has no harmony and because of this there are no orchestras in our sense of the word. If Indian musicians get together and play on various instruments each player plays the same melody or produces a background for the melody.

And yet Indian music conforms to very strict laws, stricter perhaps than ours. Our music is based on harmony, on an ever-changing background of chords ; theirs is based entirely on melody with a static background which of course tends to limit its range. But to compensate for the lack of harmony, much elaboration and many decorative

instruments are introduced. Percussion instruments change, the rhythm and timing, there is much twisting and playing around the note itself, and many variations adorn the tune, being left to the imagination of the player.

This ornamentation is of course only noticeable to the trained listener.

A universal notation of recording does not exist but there are several systems all based on the writing of the note by its letter. The Indian equivalent of our Do, Re, Me is Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa. But signs for divisions, grace-notes, sharps and flats all vary according to the composer or player. Notation is only really a means to aid the memory.

The octave is divided into twenty-two notes to our twelve. Western music moves in leaps, in abrupt and definite divisions. Here it moves on tiptoe, in little steps, and even these almost merge into each other. It is a music of moods and impressions, of delicate tunes and minute notes.

The whole form and structure of Indian music is built on the Raga. Raga means a mood or charm, and consists of a group of notes which convey a certain feeling and association. Instead of a piece being named, it is grouped in one of the hundreds of Ragas. These are divided into genders, seasons, times, moods and many other subdivisions. There are different Ragas for rain, sun, night, love, hate, religious purposes. . . . To give certain meanings and effects, many of these Ragas can be combined and cleverly manipulated. The result depends on the individual abilities of the player. Every good Indian musician has to be a composer at the same time. He has the main features of the Ragas in his mind but to string them together, to interpret them with force and imagination is left entirely to himself. The Raga is also a great help to the listener. He knows what to expect as soon as the first notes of one of the standard Ragas are played. Knowing the subject, he can now concentrate on the interpretation ; on the many



decorative and subtle points with which the musician adorns the performance.

Records of Indian music go back to 2000 B.C. Then music was mainly vocal and religious. And although it is no longer entirely concerned with religion, basically it has not changed at all. The technique has improved and become more complicated as time has gone on, but the original, very simple melodic form has remained static. Indian music has, therefore, never developed beyond the plain-song stage, to use a western comparison. From this mediæval church music which consisted of simple melodies that could only be varied and complicated by changed rhythm and accent, the harmonic form emerged. Once this had happened, the evolution of our music as we know it today, had begun. Indian music has never acquired harmonics. It has remained purely melodic, and so it is still in the same stage of development as western music was in the middle ages.

The purest and simplest music is still to be found in South India, where the ancient Hindu life has remained untouched by the Mohammedan influence. When the Moslems invaded the North, from about A.D. 1000 onwards, they affected the music just as they affected everything else. But the changes they brought were in style, not in principle. They introduced many new instruments, which gave an added richness and widened the range of expression. Up till then, such instruments as there were had been used solely as a background for the voice. But even today, vocal music takes precedence over any other.

Drums are the oldest instruments ; they are still second only in importance to the tune. From them comes the rhythm ; variations of rhythm in Indian music are as valuable as rich harmonies to a western composition. There are all sorts of different drums. They are played with the hands. The palms, the fingers and even the



Fingernails are subtly used, and it takes ten to twelve years to acquire a really comprehensive technique. The simplest percussion instrument, but a very important one, is the Galtrang. It consists of tea cups filled to varying degrees, until they are tuned to the scale.

The holy conch-shell is the first of the wind instruments because it is always used for festivals and religious ceremonies. It has the same dignity and significance for the Indians as the trumpet has in the West. Then there is the bamboo flute, always associated with the romantic young black-faced god, Krishna, who is the hero of innumerable love songs. Flutes are popular, and there are several different varieties. There is also a kind of oboe, called the Shannai, which is rather crude and noisy and sounds better out of doors.

Of the stringed instruments, the oldest and finest is the Vina. The Vina not only looks romantic, but makes a romantic noise. It has a large bowl made of gourd on which the body with its many frets is placed. A delicately curved neck with a second gourd increases the volume of tone. One might compare it with a guitar, although modern Vinas often have as many as twenty-four strings and are played with the fingernails or a plectrum. Saraswati, the beautiful goddess of learning and the arts, is always shown playing the Vina.

Of the other stringed instruments, there is the Sitar, with its sympathetic understrings which vibrate and echo when the principle strings are sounded ; the Tambura which has only four strings tuned to the drone, the fifth, the octave and the drone again—these notes are played again and again to create a background for the solo instrument or singer ; the Sarod which is played with a plectrum and is a sort of combined mandoline and banjo, and the Sarangis which is a bowed instrument, used to produce innumerable minor and grace-notes.

As I began to understand Indian music and got to know



than different instruments, my ability to listen certainly improved. When I hear it now, it no longer sounds like wailing. And sometimes, when they play the simpler and more recognisable Ragas, I can hear the rain falling or the young wife praying for the love of her husband. But it still remains the strangest and most bewildering of all their art forms. When the soul of India sings, the song is in a foreign language.

Which seems to prove the limitations of the average white man when compared with the average Indian, whose appreciation of the arts is altogether admirable, in that it knows no frontiers.



TIME OFF FOR PUJAS

EVERY other day is a holiday for the Hindu. You can be quite sure that whenever there is anything important you want done, there will be a puja in progress and everywhere will be shut. If you are lucky, it will only last a day, but it is much more likely to go on for four. Even if there is not a puja, the chances are that everyone will be suffering from "the morning after," so they might as well have stopped work anyway. The Hindus love their pujas and keep as many as they can possibly fit into the week; they do not believe in letting work interfere too much. And, of course, they need their Sundays in which to recuperate from their pujas and their work.

It is essential to the pious Hindu that he should be on good terms with his gods, of whom there are literally hundreds. It is in their power to visit him with frightful diseases, they can bring bad luck in business, they can make his wife barren, they can cause the crops to fail; there is nothing they cannot do if they are not humoured. If any one of them were forgotten, it might be fatal. It is his sacred duty to them and to himself to get around to as many pujas as he can. As there are well over a hundred of these a year, they keep him pretty busy.

A puja usually consists of a day of fasting and prayer followed by rejoicing with music and dancing and a long procession through the town or village. The days and even the hours for these celebrations are appointed according to the positions of the moon and the heavenly bodies. Hindu calculation of dates and years is rather elastic, but



the calendar most generally used is the one founded by the great king, Vikramaditya Sakari, in 57 B.C.

The Hindu year which begins, quite sensibly, in the spring, is divided into six seasons of two months each; *Vasanta* (spring), *Greeshma* (summer), *Varsha* (monsoon), *Sarad* (autumn), *Hemanta* (pre-winter), and *Sisira* (winter). Each month is divided into the light phase and the dark phase of the moon. The light phase is very good, the dark phase is very bad. Bed is really the best and safest place to be during the latter. Each day of the week has its own significance and is sacred to a different god.

But all these divisions and subdivisions are only provisional and superficial, for the world and all time are divided into four *Yugas*, or Ages. Time and the world have always passed and will continue to pass through these same four cycles in a never ending spiral, *ad infinitum*.

The first age is the *Satya*; the Golden Age, the Age of Truth, the Garden of Eden; its duration is almost two million years.

The second is the *Treta Yuga*; the Silver Age, when the Trinity—Creation, Preservation and Destruction—comes into being. Life is still good, but it is no longer paradise. This goes on for one million two hundred and ninety-six thousand years.

The third is that of *Dwarpara*; the Age of Good and Bad, when evil and corruption manifest themselves on earth. This lasts for eight hundred and sixty-four thousand years.

The whole trouble lies in the fact that we are now in the *Kali Yuga* or Evil Age of suffering and penance. Fortunately, this fourth cycle is comparatively short, a mere five hundred thousand years. . . . Then the world will have paid its price and can return once more to the Golden Age.

The belief of the Indian masses is absolute and fanatic and it has to manifest itself somewhere and somehow.



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It does in the processions and festivals, the focal point of which is always the image of the god. It is in front of the image that the many acts of self-torture are performed. It is to the image that the proofs of this boundless, unreasoning, illogical faith are offered. And it is through the image that the hysterical craving for self-expression is satisfied.

At the annual Jaggannath Puja, in Puri, the vast crowds wrestle and fight to get near the immense twenty-four-wheeled wagon which carries the Lord of the Universe: Jaggannath or Vishnu. They struggle to kiss the sand over which the wagon has passed, to get hold of one of the many ropes by which it is drawn and to shower valuables and money over the god. At every Jaggannath Puja, there are always some who work themselves into such a frenzy that they cannot be prevented from throwing themselves down to be broken by the huge wooden wheels and crushed by the weight of the image.

There is probably no religion in the world that attaches so much importance to image worship. These fantastic and lurid things are everywhere you go in India, in every town and every village, in private houses, in jungles and in deserts. And there is always a demand for more and more. After every big puja new gods have to be built, as most of them are destroyed at the climax of the ceremonies by fire or water, according to the ritual attached to the worship of that particular deity.

Image making is, therefore, a large and important industry and one that has existed in India for thousands of years. The image makers, or Kumbharkas, are a caste on their own. They are interesting because although their trade could hardly be more characteristic of the regressive side of Indian life, they themselves are some of the best organised and most progressive tradesmen in the country.

In Bengal, the oldest and most prominent of the Kumbharka families are the Pauls who came originally from



Krishnagar, the home of image making. Now more than half the caste carry this name, and it is a Mr. A. Paul, B.A., who runs the All Bengal Kumbharka Association. The union has three hundred thousand members representing over sixty per cent of the Kumbharkas in the province. The wives and children are counted, but only the earning members pay the subscription of four annas a quarter.

The Association was founded in 1922 by another Paul, Mahendranath, as a sort of marriage agency to find good wives and husbands for the image makers. Then the parents went a step farther and began to discuss communal problems and possible improvements. Within a few years this grew into a nation-wide organisation to protect and better the lot of the Kumbharka and to influence every sphere of his life.

This Association shows what one section of the Indian workers can do for themselves if they really set about it. It gives legal aid and advice and has founded many schools; financial grants are given and even higher education made possible. Doctors are under contract to look after the health of the members. During famines, committees are formed and much suffering is avoided. In case of fire and accident there is organised relief for members. Many feuds and family quarrels, usually over the division of property or dowry, are settled, and for many years now the Association has been trying to check the dowry system and child marriage.

Many image makers have gone far in public life and have become important business men. Through the Association they retain a link with the old job and often help substantially to improve conditions. Radha Binod Paul, president of the Association, is also vice-president of Calcutta University, and represented India at the Hague Conference.

In spite of their progressive outlook, life is pretty hard going for the thousands of small image makers all over the



country. They only manage to make a bare living, although the children start helping from the age of five and the women spend their time making ornaments. It is only for the few weeks preceding the big pujas—when large images are required—that these people make any real money. There is not much profit in a medium-sized image, which sells at around fifty rupees, but a really large one might cost up to two thousand five hundred. Everything is made to order and paid for by groups of Hindus who get up subscriptions in the towns and villages.

When I went to Kumartuli, the small settlement of the Kumbharka in Calcutta, the busy season was on. It was just before the Durga Puja, the most important festival in Bengal when five gods are worshipped at the same time. The goddess Durga is daughter of the Himalayan mountains. She is the personification of creative energy, the centre of the universe. Ten-armed, she stands on a lion with swords in her hands and subdues her foes. With her are Kartik, the god of war, riding on a peacock; Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity, riding on a rat; Saraswati, the patroness of learning and all arts holding a lute in her hand and Lakshmi the goddess of love and good fortune, the eternal mother of the universe.

The little half-naked Kumbharkas, forming and modelling the clay, seemed utterly insignificant beside their creations. It was almost impossible to follow the light rhythmical movements of their fingers, they worked with such speed and confidence. Around them were hundreds of images in all stages of completion. Wooden skeletons, figures in straw and clay, gods without heads or arms, some matt white and others shining in brilliant colours.

Before the Kumbharka starts on his image he makes a miniature model in clay, accurate in all proportions. Then he builds a simple wooden structure. And over this he shapes the body and limbs by means of straw, tightly

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tied together. Hundreds of yards of string are used in this process which requires a great deal of skill. The first layer of clay is then evenly applied over the whole figure. The second coating is much thicker, and the features and muscles are formed. The modelling is then finished off with a final thin layer when the folds and lines of the skin are brought out. Everything is then coated with liquid chalk. After this has dried, the figures are painted in bright water colours and horse hair is stuck on to their heads. They are dressed in multi-coloured glittering paper hats, saris and dhoties, fearful weapons are put into their hands and they are lavishly adorned with shining jewellery.

During the last hundred years, images have entirely changed in appearance. The large slanting eyes, the straight, stylised nose, the thick lower lip, the tiny waist and wide hips have gone. So have the wonderful posture and movement. Western influence has mingled with Indian art and produced something which is neither one thing nor the other. The Kumbharka nowadays adheres as rigidly to this hybrid model as he did formerly to the ancient, purely Indian forms.

Time and western influence may have altered the shape of the image, but nothing has modified the way in which it is worshipped. An extreme example of this can be seen at the Charak Puja which is held on the Hindu New Year's Eve. In an endless singsong, the crowd calls upon the four gods of life, Hara, Gauri, Jaggannath and Siva, and asks their forgiveness. Gradually the community chants and dances itself into a frenzy, driven on by the beat of the drums and the hollow sound of the buffalo horn. In a frantic fever of exultation, they seize the assortment of weapons held out to them by the priests. Balancing swords on their tongues, walking on open knife blades, piercing their tongues and bodies with long, thin spikes, they plunge into a new, ecstatic dance of self-torture. The climax is



ached when some of the devotees (several of whom were children when I saw it) throw themselves into the dust. The priests approach them with giant hooks, such as might be used for the heaviest carcasses at Smithfield, and thrust them into the sweating backs of the prostrate worshippers. A tall pole, with a rotating base and long ropes hanging from the top, stands ready to receive the bodies. And when they are securely fixed, it slowly starts to turn. As the speed increases, the bodies are lifted higher and higher. There is no groaning from the victims ; they do not make a sound. The completeness of their act of worship has taken them beyond pain. When the nightmare roundabout begins to slow down again and the bodies sink lower and lower, there is an admiring mumble from the crowd. This turns to clapping and cheering when the meat hooks are finally removed. The flesh where they have been embedded shows no sign of mutilation ; there is not even any bleeding. In the eyes of the devotees, there is a look of infinite happiness and the glow of fulfilment.

I saw the same kind of thing again in the Hindu community of Penang, at the Thai Pusam festival. Penang has had an Indian minority for centuries, living among the Malaysians and Chinese who belong to other religions. These Hindus, although they are hundreds of miles away and hundreds of years removed from the home of their religion, have lost none of the original tenets of their faith. This was the most forceful illustration of unchanging Hindu ritual that I ever came across.

On a road leading out of the town, a long column of men, women and children surged forward in a purposeful yet entirely uncontrolled muddle. Each column was led by a high Brahmin blowing a huge horn to attract the attention of the gods. Behind him came one of the worshippers, the very personification of Hinduism ; one who had parted with his body so that the gods might receive his soul. He



was pierced by a hundred long iron spikes which supported a large decorated image above his head, his lips were also pierced and so was his tongue, the end of which protruded from his mouth in a slimy dripping lump. Stuck into his flesh between the iron spikes, were hundreds of little silver arrows. To show his disregard for bodily pain, he danced, slowly turning round and round to the beat of the drums and the hoot of the trumpets and the rhythmical shouts of his followers, as he made his way along the three-mile route to the temple. His eyes were the clue to this incredible display of self-torture; they glared into another world. Devotion, ecstasy, pain and exhaustion were all there, but above all madness. They were not just a pair of eyes, they were a soul.

These people were not fakirs; they were ordinary Indian men, women and children, the youngest of whom must have been about eight years old. They had been sick and had prayed to the gods and made a vow that if they recovered they would make this masochistic pilgrimage.

The three-mile dance culminates in a climb of almost a thousand steps up to the temple. It looks more like a climb to hell than to heaven, but to the Hindu it is the supreme joy because it represents the ultimate test of his endurance. The narrow steps are lined with hundreds of beggars. From top to bottom there is one seething mass of humanity, flowing over the sides, swaying up towards the temple and down towards the road, broken here and there by the staggering figures carrying images.

A little boy, his tongue and lips pierced, his mouth foaming, drags himself forward, whipped on by the cheers of his family. An old crone, coughing and wheezing, her wet hair hanging over her face, looks as if she would collapse under her burden, but her eyes shine madly and she sways up step by step. The gods may have cured her sickness,



but the price she is paying for her recovery will almost certainly kill her.

The temple is reached, but before it is entered it must be encircled three times in a last hectic dance. The final stampede of the pilgrims through the crowd of on-lookers is more bestial than spiritual. They are conscious of nothing but the desire to show themselves in their suffering to the flower-bedecked image of the Lord Subrainamain. They stand in heavenly bliss while the priest removes their spikes and heavy burdens. Then they collapse and are carried out in a coma. When they come to, they are bathed in holy waters and given their first food for forty-eight hours. During their time of preparation for the pilgrimage, they go without food and sleep and continue to pray, with the help of the priests, until they reach the state of self-hypnosis which gives them the necessary physical endurance for what they are about to undertake.

The Thai Pusam Puja originated with the Shiva sect in South India, and it coincides with the harvest. It has now become the most important festival for the Chettians, the Hindu moneylenders. By financing the whole undertaking, feeding the poor and giving money to the beggars who line the steps of the temple, the Chettians are able to repent of their sins. For them, it is not only a time of repentance, but an excellent business proposition; it is believed that every penny spent on this day in a good cause, will be returned a hundredfold in the coming year. So the Chettians get it both ways.

Why this puja, which originated as a happy day of thanksgiving for deliverance from sickness, should have turned into a masochistic orgy-cum-usurers' beanfeast, no one is able to explain. Like everything in the Hindu life and religion, there seems to be no reason, logical or otherwise.

All pujas can be traced back to origins as simple and harmless as our own English Harvest Festivals, but they



One who has parted with his body so that the gods might receive his soul.

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*The cook sits on top of the stove in between the cooking holes. . . .
The wet pancake is stuck against the inside of the funnel where it bakes
for a minute and is then taken out crisp and ready for eating.*

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Open fires where curries are always simmering in big brass bowls.

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Eating is an exceedingly difficult five finger exercise.

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have degenerated through the centuries into displays of mass hysteria. Their ritual is now designed to promote this temporary insanity and frequently has little or nothing to do with the basic idea behind the celebrations. I saw a little puja in the heart of westernised Calcutta which was a perfect example of this illogical development.

Women, dressed in simple yellow garments and followed by bullock-carts filled with fruit and grain, danced through the streets towards the Ghat where they would bathe in the holy waters. Every fifty yards they threw themselves flat on the road, their lips kissing the dust while another woman with a branch in her hand danced through their ranks and blessed them. They got up again, continued a few paces and threw themselves down once more. Their faces and clothes were smeared with dirt and their hands, elbows and forearms were cut and bruised. These women were celebrating the harvest and praying for fertility. It was obvious that many of them were already pregnant, but in their religious frenzy they were going through antics which might have been specially designed to bring on a miscarriage.

Hinduism is probably the vaguest of all religions; it is the farthest removed from reality, the most difficult to explain, the most burdensome to follow. It has no definite organisation, no clearcut rules and yet there is no religion that holds its devotees more uncompromisingly in its grip. The explanation for all this can only be found in one word: faith. But that word in itself is unexplainable.

There is more genuine faith in India than in any other country in the world. Here, one might really find the faith to move mountains. Here, anything could be accomplished. . . . If the people could take their eyes off their graven images and focus them on the mountains that stand in the path of their salvation.



CSL

XVI

KHANA

FROM the outside, India is inevitably associated with the word Famine. And yet the moment you arrive there, the first thing you notice, almost before the beggars, is the food. It is everywhere. On the station where you entrain, everyone seems to be either selling or buying or cooking or eating food. And those who are not are begging for it.

Nine-tenths of the Indian population are deeply and constantly preoccupied with thoughts of food. They are always in a state of uneasiness as to where the next meal is coming from. The fear that they may not have enough money to buy what they need is always with them, and behind that fear lurks the more terrible shadow of famine. This uncertainty seems to keep their primitive instinct for self-preservation on the surface. It makes them gobble down as much food as they can possibly swallow as often as they can get it. Provided they have the money, this is easily done; except during a famine, there is plenty to eat and it is always available from about five in the morning till well after midnight. Everywhere you go you see portable kitchens with their wares sizzling and steaming, fruit-sellers and stalls decked with sweetmeats.

The Indians can and do eat all round the clock. Lack of money is the only thing that stops them. Then they must join the army of beggars with bowls and old preserve tins, wandering the streets from house to house, from eating place to eating place, from market to bazaar, begging for scraps of the food that is heaped up all round them. Or perhaps they will join the crowds of ravenous women and



children who run alongside every train and who line up along the military carriages with their bowls, waiting to pounce on anything that a soldier might throw out of the window.

The bulk of Indian foodstuffs is bought and sold in open markets. I had to visit one of these markets regularly, to buy vegetables for the mess. It was the most important centre of food distribution in a province with a bigger population than that of England, and for general filth and lack of hygiene it was typical of the sort of place where most Indian food changes hands. The streets and alleys were narrow and congested. The air was hazy with dust and clouds of little flies, and heavy with the stink of rotting vegetables and human excreta. The food stalls led out of small dark living huts. The eatables were piled on rough wooden planks which stretched from the huts into the road, bridging an open sewer. This sewer was choked with decaying market garbage and human matter. Millions of bluebottles hovered and buzzed over the food displayed on the stalls. I found the native greengrocer sitting on the boards among his vegetables, chewing betel nut and spitting periodically. Except for a small filthy dhoti, he was naked. He was unshaven and unwashed and his legs and arms were covered with open sores. The crowds milled round the market, picking over the goods, gesticulating and bargaining. Sacred cows barged among the people, nibbling this, licking that and picking up filth from the gutters. And, as always, the pie dogs were there; just skin and bone and disease, their tails tucked in between their legs, dodging the kicks and the stones and rummaging with the rats among those incredible quantities of food.

It is the quantity of foodstuffs in India that never ceases to amaze you. This country, where the majority of the people live on a starvation diet, seems to be overflowing with rice and curry. Nothing could be more contradictory.



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You know one thing, but you see another. You know the Indians have not enough to eat, but you always see the Indians eating.

In Calcutta alone, there must be more eating places than in the whole of the British Isles. Although the Indians do feed at home, the men anyway, seem to be constantly eating out. The cheapest and most numerous eating places, which are the equivalent of the English "Pull up for Carmen" or "Teas with Hovis," are the portable pavement kitchens. Sometimes these consist of little glass-fronted cupboards containing food and a spirit lamp. The proprietor carries his cupboard about on his head until he finds a suitable pitch on a busy street, then he puts it down on the pavement and starts in. Then there is the bucket restaurant. This is just a man and a bucket. The bucket is coated inside and out with clay and filled with glowing coals. There is a hole in the lower part to scrape out the ashes and let in the draught, and on the top rests the frying pan. Rice, lentils, dhal (a compound of pulses) and other ingredients are heaped on the pavement round the bucket. The food is handed out wrapped in leaves and piping hot. Each of these places have their own special patrons for whom they cook just what, how and when the meal is ordered.

One step up are the clay kitchens along the native streets. The stoves are made of clay and are table high, occupying almost the whole length and front of the little restaurants which are open to the streets. The cook sits on top of the stove in between the cooking holes; surrounded by his pots and pans he is like a pilot at the controls. Everything is within his reach. Some holes in the stove go right down to the fire, like a funnel with the inside covered with clay. These are used for baking chapatty. A chapatty is a ball of wet dough, flattened with incredible speed and skill into a huge thin pancake by tossing it from one palm of the hand into the other. The wet pancake is stuck against the



instead of the clay funnel where it bakes for a minute and is then taken out crisp and ready for eating. The other cooking holes in the stove are the ones on which the frying pans are placed. There are also open fires over which meat balls on metal skewers are slowly turned, and where curries are always simmering in big shiny brass bowls. Piles of banana leaves, on which the food is served, are kept handy. The customers sit on the floor, tucking in for all they are worth ; their food in front of them piled on leaves or highly polished brass trays.

As well as all these rough and ready eating places, there are plenty of proper restaurants with waiters and chefs and separate kitchens. These are patronised by those Indians who are lucky enough to be able to afford to be gourmets. Eating in these restaurants is a real experience. The choice of native dishes is apparently endless, and the complexity of the cooking has to be sampled to be believed. Besides the innumerable curries, there are salads, pickles, gravies and soups without number. And there is meat and fish, spiced, baked, boiled, smoked or fried. There is every imaginable kind of vegetable chips and all sorts of chapaties which take the place of bread. Bread, as we know it, is never eaten. Sweets play a great part in most Indian menus, for the Indians, like most non-alcoholics, have a very sweet tooth.

Like the French regional cuisine, Indian cooking varies according to district and is varied again by the dictates of religion. Rice is the common denominator ; rice in hundreds of different forms. It is flattened into chira, like quaker oats, roasted and puffed into a form known as khoi, made into highly spiced pilaus, or powdered and baked into cakes called pitha. Animal fat is not used at all. The Indian's best frying medium is a kind of half-boiled butter, called ghee ; this is considered a great luxury. Vegetable oils are cheaper and are more generally used. Dahl is the



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simplest form of protein; this compound of pulses forms the basis of gravies and can also be fried into pancakes called parpar. Fruits are eaten raw, or in syrups or chutneys. Milk, curded or soured, is the basis of all sweets. Meat is the food most affected by religion; Hindus refuse beef, and of course veal, while Mohammedans eschew pork. There is a Hindu ban on fowl, but mutton, goat, eggs and fish are allowed, except by Brahmins and very orthodox Hindus.

As in any big town in France, where you will find restaurants with Spécialités de la Maison, like Bouillabaisse, Bœuf Bourguinnogne or Cepes Bearnaise, so in the large Indian cities you will find Madrassi, Bengali, Parsee, Mohammedan and Kashmiri restaurants, each specialising in their own regional dishes. At one they may do a very fine kebab (this is not unlike a Vienna steak; seasoned meat folded round minced egg and garlic and fried in ghee), or sirni (milk, sugar and coarsely ground rice boiled until thick and seasoned with essence of rose). And another might be celebrated for its mogahr musalam (plump fowl killed when the dew is at its height and hung by the claws for a period of three days, during which time the flesh is punctured with aromatic thorns while spices are massaged in through the breaks in the skin. When the carcass is thoroughly impregnated, it is stuffed with a mixture of dried fruit, egg and rice, fried in seasoned ghee and served wrapped in silver foil).

Mogahr musalam is a dish fit for the gods and so is much of the Indian khana. Madrassi coffee, for instance, is better than any in the European restaurants which are also fantastically expensive, at least four times the price of the Indian ones. Although I never dared sample the bucket shops or clay kitchens, I ate regularly in several of the Indian restaurants which were tolerably clean, and certainly no dirtier than the kitchens of the big hotels. Of



course, except in the Parsee restaurants, there is nothing to drink. This is probably one of the reasons why you practically never see Europeans availing themselves of the pleasure of the Indian cuisine. The troops would not dream of entering anywhere where there is not an "in bounds" sign to reassure them that they will not be killed by typhoid or dysentery, and the sahibs are gastronomically, no doubt, much too pukka.

If few white people patronise the Indian restaurants, even fewer ever find their way into the Indian private house. When they do, they find themselves, temporarily at least, at a great disadvantage, for they suddenly realise that they are going to have to acquire a brand new set of table, or rather floor manners. There are really no more customs and formalities relating to the Indian floor than there are to the western table. It is just that they are so very different. Before one sits down, the floor is sprinkled with water and then wiped and a small mat placed where one is supposed to sit. In front of the mat is a large flat brass dish which holds the steaming pile of rice and two or three smaller piles of salt, fish and chutney. All the other foodstuffs are arranged in a separate half-circle of small brass bowls round the mat. On the right is a brass tankard of water, then a dish of lemons, then the salad, then the chutney, dhal, curry and so on until the half-circle is complete. The last two bowls are filled with sweetmeats and fruit.

One sits down painfully, feeling exceedingly clumsy and, as soon as one has managed to get one's feet out of the food, the real business of eating begins. This is very complicated. Some rice must be picked up, kneaded into a ball and then dipped in something or other and then into something else, and so it goes on. The meal is a series of dippings, mixings and kneadings; like this each mouthful is concocted to exact individual requirements. Conversation is very secondary to the actual technique of eating. If an



Indian invites you to Khana, he invites you to eat; conversation will take place afterwards over the chewing of all sorts of seeds and nuts, while coffee and the Hubble Bubble are passed round. But before this stage is reached and directly the meal proper is over, the party rises from the floor and, led by the host, repairs to the washroom. Here the most elaborate ablutions are performed; mouths are rinsed out with a great deal of vociferous gargling and spitting and there is much washing of faces and hands.

It is the hand which is the key to Indian floor manners; the right hand is the Indian's knife, fork and spoon. To eat politely with it is not easy at all. It is an exceedingly difficult five-finger exercise. There is no question of grabbing a handful of food and stuffing it in; it must be picked up with the tips of the fingers (only as far as the first joint) and conveyed to the mouth without anything being spilled on the way. The fingers must never actually enter the mouth but any sucking noise would be considered a definite breach of etiquette. One has to resort to a bird's drinking technique until one gets the knack. I found it much more difficult than eating with chopsticks.

But the refinements of how and how not to use the right hand is nothing compared with the one cardinal taboo of the Indian floor: the touching of the food with the left hand. This is something no Indian must ever do under any circumstances. And, as in the case of most taboos, there is a very good reason for it. To the people of the West, the automatic use of the knife, fork and spoon and the toilet roll is almost as natural as eating or going to the lavatory. I wonder how many Europeans realise that there are four hundred million Indians to whom it would never occur to use anything but the right hand for the one and the left hand for the other of these two universal if widely divergent purposes.



MEDICINE

WHEN I came to Calcutta on leave, I usually stayed with two English friends. This man and his wife were both doctors. One was in charge of a medical laboratory and the other had been for over two years the only white doctor at an Indian hospital. During the time they had been in India, they had both developed very definite opinions about Indian medicine—that is medicine as practised by the Indians—and they did not object to my insatiable curiosity on the subject. Although I had very little first-hand experience, their specialised and very detailed knowledge gave me a far better picture of Indian medical methods than I could ever have got on my own. Most of what they told me was depressing, but that was inevitable, judging, as they were bound to do, from the standpoint of western medicine. I asked what they thought about conditions in India in their particular sphere and they told me. What they told me, they believe to be the opinion of most other medical officers who have served out there.

Indian doctors, they told me, may qualify as graduates of a university medical school, or as licentiates of one of the smaller medical colleges where the course is shorter. Naturally the graduates are, on the whole, of a higher standard than the licentiates, but both groups have much in common which seems to depend more on nationality than on training.

Indian medicine is, at present, of a much lower standard than that practised in the West. My friends gave three reasons for this. A doctor should have a good knowledge



on the principles of medicine, should have intellectual honesty, and should have a benevolent interest in his patient as a human being. They found the Indian doctors, in most cases, deficient in all three categories.

They said that where the principles of medicine are concerned, the knowledge of most Indian doctors consists largely of a conglomeration of empirical facts, without any theory or principle to connect them into a coherent whole. As such knowledge cannot be applied intelligently, they often make mistakes, and frequently find themselves completely at sea when faced with any condition which is not typical and straightforward. They like to make rapid "spot diagnoses" on the basis of one or two presenting symptoms, without a thorough examination and without attempting to exclude other conditions which might produce the same picture. Only when the treatment for the diagnosed condition fails is another diagnosis attempted and another treatment instituted. Drugs are often used quite irrationally, and the more uncertain the doctor's opinion, the smaller is the prescribed dose of the appropriate drug, so that even if his diagnosis happens to be right, the treatment is usually inadequate. Drugs are sometimes completely withheld for odd reasons; once, my friend found a patient wandering round the hospital, begging for relief from what appeared to be a very painful affliction. When his medical officer was asked whether he thought that the man was malingering, he replied: "No, he is in very great pain." "Then why on earth don't you give him some morphia?" "I cannot do that," said the medical officer. "He might become a morphia addict!"

Intellectual honesty is not easily achieved by the Indian who is invariably very reluctant to admit that he does not know anything, and still more reluctant to admit that he has been in the wrong. This characteristic is to be found among their doctors, and it leads inevitably to a dishonest



outlook, making them slow to learn from experience, and creating a serious barrier to their further self-education. Pathologists of Indian hospitals often complain that when they are asked to carry out a post-mortem examination on some patient who has died without his disease being diagnosed, they are unable to get any notes on the case from the ward. The reason is that the clinicians refuse to write up the notes of the case until they know the results of the post-mortem examination, when they can make certain that their findings correspond with the final diagnosis. Another aspect of intellectual dishonesty is the wishful thinking displayed in assessing the results of treatment, especially any new treatment. A senior Indian physician, who had been trying out a new treatment, described to my friend the "glow of well-being" which came over the patient as soon as the injection was begun. The statement was obviously absurd, as the treatment could not possibly have taken effect at such an early stage. It turned out eventually that this "glow of well-being" was undoubtedly a feverish reaction due to the dirty and unsterile state of the syringe which was used to give the injection.

It is inevitable that the doctor's attitude towards his patient is affected by the cheapness of human life in India. And, among Hindus at least, there is not even lipservice paid to the idea of the brotherhood of man. It is not surprising therefore that the patient is regarded as a technical problem of not very great importance. My friends cited the example of a patient who died after eight weeks in hospital. In the first two days he had been inadequately examined and had been prescribed an inadequate treatment. Thereafter he went steadily downhill and died without further examination or treatment. He could undoubtedly have been cured. An extreme example of the casual attitude towards patients was seen in an Indian Military Hospital where a patient was notified as dead. The patient, however,



surprised his unit by reporting himself, in the flesh, about six weeks later. He apparently became bored with being in bed, walked out and went home to his village for a holiday. When his absence was noticed in the hospital, it was decided that as he had not been officially discharged, he must have died, and his documents were entered up accordingly. The correspondence necessary to bring the man officially back to life again had to be seen to be believed.

Indian specialists vary very much in quality. Those who have studied and taken higher degrees in western universities, are generally able specialists, but few of those who have taken only Indian higher degrees are worthy of specialist standing. Which raises the whole question of the difference between the two systems of education. In theory, Indian and western university degrees are equivalent, because the syllabus is the same in each and the students are therefore supposed to reach the same standard. In practice they do not, and graduates in science, for instance, generally know little if anything more than English students who have just passed the same subjects in matriculation. The reason is to be found partly in the university and partly in the student. The university teaching is undoubtedly defective in that it devotes too much time to details (which the student forgets as soon as he has taken the exam.) and not enough time to general principles. Also the examination standards are too low, partly because a high rate of failures discourages new entrants and tends to diminish the teacher's salary, and partly because the examiner accepts parrot-knowledge of facts in place of knowledge of principles. The student on the other hand regards a degree as a valuable asset purchased by his fees, rather than a recognition of knowledge gained by hard work. Exams, are looked upon as obstacles to be overcome by any possible means. On one occasion in Calcutta all the examinees refused to proceed with an anatomy paper and walked out, complaining that



the questions were too hard. This procedure was unusual enough by western standards, even discounting the more plausible explanation that the paper had been changed at the last minute, thereby thwarting those students who had the foresight to obtain an advance copy of the original paper.

My friends talked a good deal about the "hakims" who practise Indian native or Ayurvedic medicine. These practitioners are not licensed, and their medicine is a semi-magical procedure consisting of the administration of herbal remedies, most of which have no pharmacological action. I was shown a letter written by a hakim who had been asked to provide a specimen of urine to be tested by the consultant who had been called in to treat one of his cases.

"Dear Sir,

The patient's stomach yesterday swelled due to winds commencing from five p.m. At midnight passing of urine stopped. She could breathe with great difficulty. I gave her Hakimi medicines and after some hours she passed urine three or four times. However, as promised, I am sending her urine. If you think there is no harm in the examination of this urine, you may send the same for necessary examination.

Yours truly,"

In a superstitious country where the number of doctors is far below its needs, such practitioners are inevitable. But if, as it is said, Gandhi wants to encourage them and set up their system in opposition to western medicine, it is a bad lookout for India.

Nursing is one of India's greatest medical problems, as the demand for nurses far exceeds the supply. Nursing requires girls of education, intelligence and independence, and such girls are not easy to find. The educated independent girl is to be found mainly in the wealthy westernised (especially Parsee) families, and they are more likely to become



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doctors—and often very good doctors—than to take up the more menial life of a nurse. Conditions for nurses in Indian hospitals are very much worse than in English hospitals, and the pay is lower. The majority of nurses belongs to the Anglo-Indian community; their medical knowledge is not as a rule so great as that found in English nurses, but they are usually keen and conscientious, and do their work efficiently in difficult circumstances. The reluctance of Indian patients, however ill, to stay in bed, and their ingrained habit of spitting on the floor, make the task of running a ward a very difficult one.

Public health in India is completely inadequate. A low standard of medicine linked with an inefficient and corrupt system of local government would hardly be likely to produce anything else. That the size of India magnifies her health problems is obvious, but that is no excuse for the inert attitude of the local authorities. In Calcutta, for example, cholera is endemic and periodically breaks out into epidemics with a high mortality, but nothing is done to stop it. Smallpox is also endemic, and tends to produce epidemics every winter. In the winter of 1944-5 another epidemic was obviously on the way, but the Calcutta Corporation, in spite of repeated warnings, took no effective action to introduce mass vaccination until it was finally controlled and assisted by the Government of Bengal. When mass vaccination finally began, an examination of the Calcutta Corporation lymph was made by experts who reported that it was produced and stored in an unsatisfactory way and was below the standard potency. The Bengal Government published the report, and announced that the half-million people who had already been vaccinated with the corporation lymph should be immediately re-vaccinated. This was ridiculous anyway, because if the vaccination had "taken" it was unnecessary to repeat it, and if it had not, then it had to be repeated irrespective of



the potency of the lymph used. Public health in what the *Statesman* ironically calls "The Second City of the Empire," is anything but healthy.

Although they felt themselves obliged to criticise and even condemn Indian Medicine all round, my friends constantly pointed out that much of the trouble was due to the backwardness of India. They also said that it should always be remembered that Western Medicine has not long been generally available to Indian students and therefore India cannot be expected to achieve western standards for a good many years. A small minority of doctors who have reached a very good standard of knowledge and practice does exist today, but the Indian profession as a whole must change its attitude to medicine and to the patient before any real advances can be hoped for. Even their doctors and scientists suffer from the universal complaint of blaming all their shortcomings on the British Raj. Some have gone so far as to say that they cannot be expected to do good work until the British have quit. When the Indians have no one to blame but themselves, it will be interesting to see how their medicine develops. My friends were not very optimistic. It is the Indian mentality which, in their opinion, is really at fault. And they are of the opinion that medicine in an independent India is liable to get quite a lot worse before it begins to get better.



ANGLO-INDIANS

As soon as he finds his way to any of the larger towns in India, the lonely B.O.R. will immediately be struck by the remarkable hospitality of one section of the community. The white population and the Indians will, as likely as not, ignore him but he can always be sure of a royal welcome from the Anglo-Indians. These are the people of mixed European and native blood, who make up about one per cent of India's four hundred millions. Before 1935, when their status was legally defined by the Government of India, they were more commonly known as Eurasians ; now they are officially termed Anglo-Indians.

They will pounce on the British soldier wherever they happen to find him, invite him to their homes and entertain him for all they are worth. If he has never heard of the Mendelian theory, he may be a little surprised at how much these friendly people vary in colour (it is not uncommon for members of the same family to range from darkest Madrassi brown to the lightest Scandinavian blond) but as they chatter away in their high-pitched sing-song voices, he will soon begin to feel at ease ; for in their small houses and bungalows there is a cosy suburban atmosphere and much to remind him of his own civilian life.

He will find himself surrounded by familiar furniture that looks as if it came from Drage, cocktail cabinets, potted plants, carpets and curtains with modern patterns and chromium lamps and ashtrays. There is nothing here to suggest he is in India ; he really might be at home, except for the uniformed native servants and ayahs. If



he has not been in India very long, he will probably find them rather impressive.

The soldier will be delighted to find the younger members of the family passionately fond of dancing and swing, and he will enjoy listening to the latest Bing Crosby records on the gramophone. The girls are full of fun and not a bit shy. They have a racy look about them and he will be attracted by their sweater-girl figures and the long page-boy hair. It is obvious that they are crazy about the movies, for they use American slang, chew gum and know all about the latest Hollywood hits. Their brothers are as keen on jitter-bugging and the cinema as they are; they also know a lot about cricket and football. They wear well-cut English sports jackets and grey flannels, and their conversation turns frequently to beer and pubs.

There is no doubt about it, the Anglo-Indian's guest is in clover, genuine clover, laced with whisky. But after a short time, even the simplest soldier begins to realise that there is a policy behind this lavish hospitality. He discovers that he is the focal point around which the dearest hopes of the family revolve. That their daughter should marry a white man who will take her back to England, is the be all and end all of their ambitions. For this is the best and most complete way in which they can consolidate the carefully cultivated Anglo side of their lives and a tangible negation of the Indian.

Once he has recognised this "Anglo mania" and its accompanying "Indian phobia," the visitor will notice its manifestations in almost everything the Anglo-Indians say and do. It is the key to and the curse of their lives. The older members of the family will make constant references to England as "Home"—a strangely olde worlde, undemocratic home, populated exclusively with Lords and Pukkah Sahibs; an Odeon demi-paradise, in fact. That no member of the family, for the last five generations at least



has been nearer to England than Karachi is pathetically obvious. Nothing, however, will induce them to drop the pretence that they are British Born and Bred. Nothing will prevent them from taking endless pains to prove to you that they were born in "Birmingham Cantonment"; "Manchester Cantonment" or "London Cantonment"; the façade *must* be preserved. It is not just that they have to convince the visitor; they have to convince themselves.

Their superhuman efforts to achieve what they believe to be an English standard of living and the tenacity with which they cling to English customs, make the Anglo-Indian's life not only an unrewarding one, but far more difficult than it might be. Their average income was estimated in 1937 to be round about £120 a year, and with that they have to keep servants, educate their sons and daughters, belong to clubs and drink whisky.

Often, as they get older, the struggle becomes too much for them. They give up, and cease to care; they let themselves drift. Then the façade collapses and there is nothing behind it; nothing except the hatred of everything Indian. The women age rapidly; the sparkle and gaiety of their youth leave them and they become fat or haggard when they are barely thirty. They start drinking and slop about the streets in slippers looking dirty and frowsy. The men do not give up quite so openly; their suits remain tidy, although they are old and worn. But you can see the strain on their tired, apathetic faces when they are still young. They aren't pretending any more; anyone can see that they have lost the battle and that reality has caught up with them.

The Anglo-Indian is haunted by racial consciousness. Colour is at the root of his inferiority complex, and from this comes his deep, inherent snobbery. He is not only intolerant of the Indians, but of anyone with a darker skin than himself, including his own kind. He is a snob because



the British have been snobbish towards him. They have called him "chi-chi" or "country," and not allowed him to occupy executive positions, reminding him in all his dealings with them that they are his social and racial superiors. They have taught him what to do. And so he treats his Indian servants far worse than he himself has ever been treated, for he despises the Indians much more than the British have ever despised him. A dark-skinned Anglo-Indian would rather see his daughter dead at his feet than married to an Indian several shades lighter than himself. He is far more fanatic on the subject than the most pukkah Englishman, because his intolerance is the result of ignorance and humiliation. His unreasoning Anglo-mania and India-phobia make him dream of and scheme for a blue-blooded white son-in-law, but very few Europeans ever do marry Anglo-Indians, so that they are obliged to marry within their own community and beget children who cannot help but inherit their traditional lack of realism and false values.

Like everyone else with a strong inferiority complex, the Anglo-Indian is terribly sensitive and touchy. If you work with him, you have to be very careful not to offend him; the slightest criticism or failure to comply with a request will hurt him to the quick. He takes everything personally; any set-back is the direct result of the colour of his skin and his breeding. And there is, of course, a good deal of truth in this; no Anglo-Indian has the same chance in the army, for instance, as a European or even an Indian. The European represents England and the Indian, India, but the Anglo is representative of nothing; he is a nonentity and what is worse, he is coloured. All the big political and administrative jobs are reserved for the Indians and the British; the Anglo has not even the right to apply for them. It is hardly surprising that he feels himself ill-used.



And so, in what amounts pretty well to self-defence, these people have cut themselves off from the British and Indian communities and formed their own minority. Living their own lives, and following their own customs, they are to be found in their own quarters of every large town. Their life is essentially urban ; they would never live on the land, that sort of work is far too Indian, besides, they need their own kind round them to give them self-assurance. Their children go to Anglo-Indian schools, and later the sons take up the few strictly defined occupations that their fathers and grandfathers have followed before them, while the girls, until they marry, work as secretaries and clerks. But it is in the nursing profession, which is almost exclusively recruited from the Anglo-Indians, that they have made their really great contribution to the welfare of India. As nurses they are skilled and selfless, and this work seems to give them the fulfilment and assurance they so badly need. Since the war, many of the girls have also joined the forces ; there too, away from the oppressive atmosphere of their own community, they have proved what they can do if given the chance.

Religion plays a very large part in the life of the Anglo-Indians, most of whom are Roman Catholics, and all of whom are very regular church goers. But in this, as in all other aspects of their lives, they have managed to find a cause for resentment. In attending Divine Service, they are obliged to come into contact with the six million Indian Christians, who are also exceedingly devout. The Anglos are in constant fear that they may be confused or mixed up with these converts in some way or another. Brotherhood in Christ comes a very poor second to India-phobia.

The Roman Catholic tradition among the Anglo-Indians goes back as far as their whole problem ; to the beginning of the sixteenth century and the arrival of the Portuguese in India. These early settlers encouraged intermarriage



wish the native women as a means of implanting their faith and consolidating their trading position. And when the British arrived at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they in their turn encouraged intermarriage with the women of the Portuguese-Indian unions. By 1687, the East India Company was expanding so rapidly that there were not enough Portuguese-Indians to go round, so our soldiers began to inter-marry with the ordinary natives.

On April 8th the Court of Directors announced that : "The marriage of our soldiers to the native women of Fort St. George is a matter of such consequence to posterity that we shall be content to encourage it with some expense, and have been thinking for the future to appoint a pagoda (about nine shillings) to be paid to the mother of any child that shall hereafter be born of any such future marriage, upon the day the child is christened, if you think this small encouragement will increase the number of such marriages."

The policy of encouragement continued to the extent of allowing five rupees a month for every child born to a soldier in the ranks, with the result that by the end of the eighteenth century, the half-caste population of India considerably exceeded that of the white. The Company began to get worried about this and found it necessary to go into reverse: the half-castes were a great deal too numerous and too prosperous and there was a danger of their occupying too many of the higher paid posts. So in April and November, 1791, two resolutions were passed, designed to cook the Anglo-Indian goose :

"Any person, the son of a Native Indian, is debarred from employment in Civil, Military or Marine services of the Company."

In 1795 came another debarring :

"all persons not descended from European parents on both sides from service in the army except as fifers, drummers, bandsmen and farriers."



Account Valentia reported to the Company in 1806 that :
“The most rapidly accumulating evil of Bengal is the increase of half-caste children. They are forming the first step to colonisation by creating a link of union between the English and the Natives. In every country where this intermediate caste has been permitted to rise, it has ultimately tended to its ruin. Spanish America and San Domingo are examples of this fact. Their increase in India is beyond calculation : and though possibly there may be nothing to fear from the sloth of Hindus and the rapidly declining consequence of Mussalmans, yet it may be justly apprehended that this tribe may hereafter become too powerful for control. Although they are not permitted to hold offices under Company, yet they act as clerks in almost every mercantile house ; and many of them are sent to England to receive the benefit of a European education. With numbers in their favour, with a close relationship with the natives, and without an equal proportion of the pusillanimity and indolence which is natural to them, what may not in future times be dreaded from them ? ”

In 1822 the Bengal Supreme Court declared that these “half-castes” were not British subjects. This was too much for the Anglo-Indians, and in 1829 they petitioned in Parliament. This resulted in the renewal of the Companies Charter which provided that : “no native of the said territories, nor any natural born subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall by reason of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the said Company.”

In spite of this, the higher posts in the Company continued to be recruited direct from England, and the “half-castes” were only to be found in the lower grade jobs. But what was much worse, from their point of view, was the fact that the Company began to open schools for the exclusive use of the Indians, with a view to educating them



for executive positions. As the attitude of the British towards the Indians became increasingly liberal, the position of the Anglo-Indians became more and more tragic and anomalous. It has been a slow process of deterioration from their hey-day at the end of the eighteenth century down to the present time.

But the Anglo still looks down on the Indians, although they have passed him and left him standing. Only a few decades ago they were his subordinates, and that is something he cannot forget, even if they do now occupy all the important positions and offices. He hates these new masters of his ; hates them as only a man can who has to take orders from a former servant whom he still regards as his inferior.

During the period in which the Indians (or at least a percentage of them which vastly outnumbers the Anglos) advanced so rapidly, the Anglos stood still. While the Indians were discovering a pride in their race and culture, the Anglos were busy with their own little self-defensive huddle. While thousands of Indians attend the universities and many go to Europe for their schooling, the Anglo is scrimping and scraping to give his children a secondary education. It is all he can afford with that only fair to moderate salary he earns in one of those fair to moderate jobs on the railway or in the Post Office, Customs, Police and other auxiliary forces. The Indians are now politically conscious and are about to achieve their freedom and self-government, but the poor Anglo is still clinging desperately to the tail of the British horse which has long since dropped out of the race.

What with the Anglo's galloping India-phobia and his blind adherence to everything English, it would be very surprising indeed if the Indians did not reciprocate his feelings. That they do is perfectly natural. They, like him, can also remember the days when he was in the ascendant, and the fact that the present-day police force contains

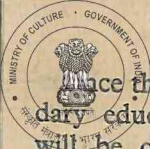


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a very large percentage of Anglo-Indians keeps their antagonism on the boil. I have met these policemen and seen them at work in Calcutta. They are a tough unsympathetic bunch ; there is no doubt at all that they allow their personal hatred of the Indians to influence them in the discharge of their duties. Almost every week, nowadays, they have to break up political meetings, and I know that they don't handle this kind of job with kid gloves. There is, unfortunately, a good deal of truth in those gruesome stories about their brutal methods of interrogating political and other suspects. Of course, from the policeman's point of view, this is an ideal chance to get his own back and "show the natives" ; and a positive way in which he can uphold and defend the British Raj. And in this capacity, at least, it must be admitted that the British Raj owes the despised chi-chi a good deal.

And yet I am quite sure that if the Anglos could only bring themselves to pocket their false pride and discard their prejudices, it would be perfectly possible for them to come to terms and co-operate with the Indians. For although he cannot help disliking the half-caste, there is nothing fanatic in the native's feeling towards him. The Indian is in a strong position ; he knows it and can afford to be generous. The Hindu is, above all, a tolerant person ; tolerance towards all other creeds and races is the basis of his own religion and way of life. The Congress Party, which represents the majority, is open to all races and creeds—this is an essential part of its programme. The Indian leaders have frequently reiterated that they are prepared to give the Anglo-Indians an equal chance. There seems to be no reason at all to assume that they will be victimised once the Indians are in power. I have never heard an Indian so much as mention retribution for past sins and misunderstandings when discussing the Anglo-Indian question.



Since the British have left, the stolid efficiency and secondary education of those four hundred thousand people will be of inestimable value to the Indian community. The part they play in the running of the railways, post offices and customs, in the nursing profession, police and other auxiliary forces throughout the country is a vital one. No Indian government is going to be so foolish as to throw overboard such a large potential source of wealth and prosperity.

That their only possible future must and does lie with the Indians has reluctantly begun to dawn on at least some of the Anglo-Indians. The "Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Association" (whose president, Frank Anthony, is a member of the Viceroy's Council) has been formed and is working for a closer understanding. A certain amount has been achieved; the exclusive Anglo-Indian schools are now admitting twenty-five per cent Indians, young Anglos are being given facilities to study engineering and other practical subjects and are being encouraged to settle on the land. It is also significant that the politically conscious *Anglo-Indian Monthly* has trebled its subscription in the last three years.

All this is a step in the right direction, but any kind of general progress is still appallingly slow. At the other end of the scale is the "Britasia League," whose members view the prospect of an India ruled by Indians as a Fate Worse than Death, and propose to emigrate to the Andaman Islands when the Worst comes to the Worst.

Between these two extremes, the rest are suspended in space; with little self-respect, no clearcut aspirations for the future and not enough will power to shape their own destiny. No one can help them until they find a way to help themselves. And because this is going to be more difficult for them than any other section of the population, the Anglo-Indians are perhaps the saddest example of European



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influence in India. Here is a people who, through no fault of their own, are without background, without culture and without ideals. Nothing is theirs. Everything they have is second hand or borrowed from a civilisation that has no further use for them.



THIS INDIA

PEOPLE who read the papers can be divided roughly into three groups ; those who read the news proper, those who read the news and the advertisements (the best example of this group are the avid Agony Columnists who take *The Times*) and those who read the news and the advertisements and also keep a weather eye skinned for suitable This Englands. I am inclined to think that group three gets the most pleasure out of its daily reading ; its taste is so much more catholic than that of the others. Some tattered provincial rag picked up in a railway carriage will keep a This Englander happy for hours, and his approach to a school magazine, a Cow Keeper's Guide or an *Old Moore* is that of a big game hunter.

When you go to India and start reading the local papers, you are perpetually tearing and snipping out cuttings and stuffing them into your wallet. Even if you were not a member of group three at home, the This Indias that hit you in the eye every time you open the *Amitra Bazar Patrika* or the *Hindusthan Standard* are such plums, you just can't help yourself. Everyone gets pockets full, drawers full, of these cuttings, and everyone compares notes. The real addicts compete and swap, like small boys with conkers.

I read the papers as often and as thoroughly as I could ; anyone who wanted to find out what India was thinking had to know what India was saying, and as time went on, I too got my drawer full of cuttings. As I am untidy and very unmethodical, I lost most of them each time I moved to a different place, but a few of them survived my con-



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ent moves and the journey back to England. That these are not necessarily the plummiest, that some of them are not even particularly funny, is perhaps a good thing; it makes them more typical. And they are absolutely typical of the news items and advertisements that you see every day in the bigger Indian newspapers.

POLITICS

“MUSLIMS OF THE PUNJAB—
SWORD-ARM
OF
PAKISTAN
KEEP
THE FLAG OF
FREEDOM
FLYING

PUNJAB GOES TO THE POLLS ON AND FROM
FEB. 1.

YOU WANT PAKISTAN—SAY SO IN THE
BALLOT-BOX

BE CAREFUL—TAKE PRECAUTIONS

HERE ARE SOME WAYS :—

Muslim Advocate and Lawyers Should Be Present At Polling Stations To Keep Polling Officers Under Constant Vigilance

Every Candidate Must Have His Own Distinctive Seal Ready *In Time* To Seal Ballot-boxes

Sources Wherefrom The Seals Were Obtained Should Not Be Disclosed *To Anybody*.

Every Candidate Should Procure *In Time* Good Sealing Wax *Which Will Stick*.



Every candidate must insist that bags in which ballot-boxes are put should be treated as packages and Also Sealed.

Every candidate should arrange to stand guard himself or have constantly guarded by trusty volunteers the treasury offices or other premises where ballot-boxes containing ballot papers are kept until counting."

Dawn.

CREDO

"NON-VIOLENCE AND MOLESTATION OF WOMEN

(By Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni)

At the close of your article on (Gandhiji's ideal of Private Secretary) (*Tribune* Feb. 12), there is a reference to Gandhiji's views as to what believers in non-violence should do "in cases of molestation of their women-folk." I remember a thrilling exposition of the question by the prophet of soul force himself in 1921 at Ahmedabad at the time of the memorable Congress session there and I think it may be of interest to your readers. . . . On that memorable occasion Gandhiji kindly invited us to ask him questions on any subject that might have been troubling us. In response to the gracious invitation a Punjab lady delegate put the following delicate question to Mahatmaji :

Q. Mahatmaji, how can a woman successfully defend her honour non-violently when she is assaulted by a beast of a man ?

A. She should do her very best to resist him in a non-violent way, but when she finds that she is being overpowered, rather than surrender her honour to the brute, she should prevent him with a corpse. She should put an end to her own life.

Q. But Mahatmaji, how can one accomplish this without a poison or other means of taking one's life ?



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Without a moment's pause, as if Mahatmaji had thought of these questions before, he said: Even in an extremity like this, one can easily put one's fingers into his or her own mouth and at once double the tongue over when in a few seconds life would be extinct.

NOTE:—If the good lady happens to read this, she may possibly write a fuller account of the dialogue.”

The Tribune.

EDUCATION

“LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

B. COM. EXAMINATION

Sir—This is an appeal of the examinees of B.Com. to the University authorities. Not only are the questions unexpected and wayward but peculiarly enough, in Book-keeping and advanced accounting the questions are fairly out of syllabus and mutually overlapping. . . .

Yours etc.,

Students of B.Com.
Rajendra College,
Chapra.”

“HARD QUESTIONS ?

Sir, It is fact that the questions of Physics in both the papers of Intermediate were extremely difficult. Some of the questions were out of course. We can't say why the question setters are bent upon being hard to students and indifferent to the money of their parents. . . .

Yours etc.,

Mrs. D. S. Chatterji
Mrs. S. N. Ghose, & others.”

Searchlight.



THIS INDIA NEWS ITEMS

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“Vizagapatam Feb. I.

A batch of fifty-four Indian repatriates from Burma arrived here from Rangoon by the *S. S. Newasa*. After giving financial assistance the evacuees were seen off last evening to their respective places.”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“—Free meals, free cigarettes of best brand and free conveyance—These were some of the amenities enjoyed by a well dressed person, who posed as a police officer for about a month in Lahore.”

Dawn.

“ . . . The harijan servant, who also ran for help, was seriously wounded and is reported serious. . . . ”

The Hitavada.

SOCIAL

“ MAHATMA GANDHI

Sevagram. Feb. II.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Gandhiji had one hour's spinning at Mahadeo Desai cottage last evening.”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“ A WEDDING

The wedding has taken place of Sreemati Kalyani Devi,. . . with Sm. Rabindra Nath Sen Gupta, . . . Many respectable gentlemen who attended the function were sumptuously fed.”

Hindusthan Standard.

“ IN THEIR GLORY

At a swimming bath this season a record number of husbands have taught their wives to swim. . . . ”

The Hindu.



INDIAN ROUTE MARCH

"RANAGHAT SPORTS

The fourth annual athletic sports of the Ranaghat Tarun Bayam Samity was held on last Sunday. . . .

Under a tastefully decorated pandal full of distinguished gathering the Tanun Bayam Samity Band was playing sweet, ceremonial & encouraging tunes."

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

ENTERTAINMENT

"NOTES ON INDIAN FILMS

. . . It seems the end of legendary lean days of Indian screen-wrights are in sight. We are hoping for the day when Indian producers shall vie with American producers in the matter of fantastic prices for their purchase of stories."

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

"Melodious Rhythm on the Sweetest
Chord of Human Life

BIOGRAPHICAL

SKETCH OF A KING

who became one of the greatest saunts
A Poet, A King, A Politician and lastly
A Devotee of God

NAVIN PICTURES PRESENT

Mumtaz Shanti

SURENDRA & AROON

RAJA

BHARTHARI. . . "

Dawn.

ADVERTISING

" . . . RAJ JYOTISH-SHIROMANI PANDIT RAMESH CHANDRA BHATTACHARYYA JYOTI-SHARNAV M.R.A.S. (LONDON) of International fame. President of the world-renowned All-India



*the clipped
pages in English*

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FRUITS OF THE EARTH

23/1/78



STANDARD EDITION
of the works of André Gide



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Other volumes in the
STANDARD EDITION
of the works of
ANDRÉ GIDE

Published by Secker and Warburg:
STRAIT IS THE GATE
DOSTOEVSKY

Published by Cassell & Co.:
TWO SYMPHONIES

In preparation for publication
by Cassell & Co.:
THE COINERS

* * *

Other works by André Gide:
THE JOURNALS (3 volumes)
BACK FROM THE U.S.S.R.





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ANDRÉ GIDE

FRUITS OF THE
EARTH

Translated from the French by
DOROTHY BUSSY



London
SECKER & Warburg
1949



LES NOURRITURES TERRESTRES

Paris: Mercure de France 1897

(*La Ronde de la Grenade* had appeared previously in *Le Centaure* and *Ménalque* in *L'Ermitage*)

LES NOUVELLES NOURRITURES

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CSL⁷⁶

TO MY FRIEND
MAURICE QUILLOT

“Food not of angels”
MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. v, 465

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PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION OF 1927

July, 1926.

TO THIS MANUAL of escape, of liberation, it is customary to confine me. The present reprint gives me the opportunity of putting before my new readers a few reflections which, by more precisely defining the motives and circumstances which gave rise to it will tend to diminish its import.

1. *Fruits of the Earth* is the work of a man who, if not actually ill, was recovering, or had recently recovered, from illness—of a man, at any rate, who had been ill. In the very flights of its poetry there is the exuberance of someone to whom life is precious because he has been on the point of losing it.

2. I wrote this book at a time when our literature was terribly imbued with a close and artificial atmosphere, and it seemed to me urgent that it should be brought down to earth once more and step again with bare feet simply on the common ground.

The book's lack of success shows how far it was at variance with the taste of the day. Not a single critic mentioned it. In the course of ten years barely five hundred copies were sold.

3. I wrote this book at a moment when I had just



settled my life; at a moment when I had voluntarily surrendered a liberty which my book—a work of art—immediately laid claim to with all the greater resolution. And in writing it I was, needless to say, perfectly sincere; but equally sincere in my heart's repudiation of it.

4. Let me add that I had no intention of stopping short at this book. I set down in it the features of the fluctuating and disengaged state I was painting much as a novelist might draw the characteristics of a hero who resembles himself but who is his invention; and it seems to me to-day that I did not draw them without detaching them, so to speak, from myself—or, if you prefer it, without detaching myself from them.

5. I am usually judged by this book of my youth as if the ethics of *Fruits of the Earth* were the ethics of my whole life, as if I myself had not been the first to follow the advice I give my young reader: "Throw away my book and leave me." Yes, I immediately left the man I was when I wrote *Fruits of the Earth*; so much so that if I examine my life, the dominating feature I note in it, so far from being inconstancy, is, on the contrary, fidelity.

6. One word more. Some people can only see in this book—*will* only see in it—a glorification of desire and instinct. This seems to me a little short-sighted. As for me, when I reopen it, what strikes me even more is the apology I find in it of a life stripped to bareness. This is what I have retained, letting go the rest, and it is precisely to this that I still remain faithful. And it is to this I owe, as I mean some day to say, my subsequent adherence to the doctrine of the Gospels, finding in self-denial the most perfect self-realisation, the highest exaction and the most boundless permission of happiness.



PREFACE

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“May my book teach you to care more for yourself than for it, and then more for all the rest than for yourself.” This is what I said before in the Introduction to *Fruits of the Earth* and in its last lines. Why force me to repeat it?



CSL

DO NOT BE deceived, Nathaniel, by the uncompromising title I have thought fit to give this book. I might have called it Menalcas; but Menalcas has never, any more than yourself, existed. The only man's name which might have been set to it is my own; but then how should I have dared sign it? I have put myself into it without affectation or shame; and if sometimes I speak in it of lands I have never visited, of perfumes I have never breathed, of actions I have never committed—or of you, my Nathaniel, whom I have not yet seen—it is not hypocrisy on my part, and these things are no more false than is this name I call you by, not knowing what yours will be—yours, Nathaniel, who will one day read me.

And when you have read me, throw this book away—and go out. May it have given you the desire to go out—to go out from wherever you may be, from your town, from your family, from your room, from your thoughts. Do not take my book with you. If I had been Menalcas, I should have led you by your right hand, but your left would not have known it, and soon—as soon as we were far from any town—I should have let go the hand I held and told you to forget me.

May my book teach you to care more for yourself than for it—and then more for all the rest than for yourself.



Astrological and Astronomical Society who is well versed in Tantra and Vedic works.

His power of calculations in Palmistry as well as in Tantrik rites is unprecedented and unrivalled. It is well-known that the astrological predictions of this great scholar, his wonderful methods of redressing the pernicious influence of evil stars, his power to treat diseases by the help of Yoga and Tantrik rites are really uncommon.

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Price Rs. 9-2-0. Special Rs. 34-2-0.

...

The Hindu.

HOUSES & FLATS TO LET

"To let decent 4 rooms. . . .

Toliygunge, Cal."

*Sunday Amrita
Bazar Patrika.*

SITUATIONS VACANT

"Herculean young B.L., high references, seeks employment with lawyer as Private Secretary. . . . Sarkar Barman, 167 Upper Chitpore Road, Calcutta."



INDIAN ROUTE MARCH

“Wanted smart Actors and Actresses for a renowned theatrical concern. Also a Director. Apply with particulars to Box T 2455 C/o Patrika, Cal.”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

MATRIMONIAL

“Wanted a well-educated, non-Kaundinya Iyengar bridegroom (Vadagalai preferred) well-established in life for a beautiful S.S.L.C. passed Vadagalai Iyengar girl, aged 19 of good social status. Apply with horoscope. . . .”

“Wanted M.B., or B.E., with brilliant carrier or settled-in-life Baidya groom with decent income for an accomplished, healthy Dhannantri Baidya bride (East Bengal), aged 28, M.A., B.T., of rich connection. Substantial dowry. Parents even agreeable to pay ten thousand cash to a really deserving groom. . . .”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“Wanted a fair, caste girl or school mistress of any religion for a secondary trained caste, Christian, vegetarian, ideal bachelor of universal religious views. . . .”

The Hindu.

MEDICAL

“Reliable
REMEDY
Dr. W. C. Roy's
ROYAPILLA
for
INSANITY

The Hindu.



THIS INDIA
PATENT MEDICINE
"YES!"

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IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

An incident which created a sensation and took the world by surprise. . . .

Some twenty years ago, a very old and feeble milkman used to serve Mahatma Ratnagiri, the famous sage of Kallathi Hills who, taking pity on his old age and in view of his humble services, granted a few doses of some medicine to the milkman. The fellow being a simple and illiterate man gulped down all the medicine at a time. The result was that at this old age, on account of the surprising vigour and vitality infused by this medicine in his famished nerves, this man had to contract three marriages one after the other being blessed ultimately with healthy children. . . . "

Dawn.

"Hydrocele cure, safe, painless, successful. No confinement. 200 testimonials (surgeon's too).

K. Edulji 275-5 Bowbazar (near Lalbazar), Calcutta."

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

VENEREAL DISEASE

"Special course of Training for Graduates and Licentiates, 6 weeks' intensive course commencing from August 27, 1945, only 15 candidates will be taken. Fee Rs. 150, apply Director, Venereal Disease Clinics, Writer's Buildings, Calcutta."

Star of India.

BIRTH CONTROL

"A 100 per cent sure and quite harmless birth control medicine for ever (permanent) Rs.20. For 5 years Rs. 12 ; for one year Rs. 6. . . .

LADY DOCTOR

KAVIRAJ SATYA VATI "

Dawn.



INDIAN ROUTE MARCH LOST AND FOUND

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“Lost. One gold wrist-watch with a gold band near Upper Chitpur Road on the 16th night. If found please return to the following address. Will remain grateful. . . .”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“Missing since August 14, a boy of 10, who was reading at Jugsalai M.E. School, Tatanagar. Caste Cayast, complexion dark, white drill pants and shirt. Any information to his father, Kedar Nath Ambust, Vill. Bagwanpur P.O. or P.O. Jugsalai, Dist. Singhum. Reward of Rs. 25, excluding fares and expenses, to person bringing the boy home.”

Statesman.

FOR SALE HIRE AND WANTED

“Agents wanted for Aluminium Bathroom Sets, Butter Dishes, Bust of Gandhi, Fish Slicers, etc., in every city. Asu Traders, Kashmere Gate, Delhi.”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“SEATS TO RENT

Aristocratic temporary accommodation for out-sider. Well ventilated sanitary fitting seats. Facility of Tram, Bus, Market, Park and Hotel.

Enquire at 20, Kalighat Park South, 2nd Floor.”

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

“For Sale, sawdust in vast quantities. Apply Manager, National Tobacco Co.”

The Statesman.

“USED TOOTHBRUSH

Wanted second-hand used Toothbrush. . . . 65 Canning St., Calcutta.”

*The Sunday Amrita Bazar
Patrika.*



QUIT INDIA

THERE is a striking similarity between the slogans "Quit India" and *Judas Verrecke*, which was the war-cry of the Nazi party. The Jews were responsible for the loss of world war I, they were organising the world against the Fatherland, it was they who hashed up the Treaty of Versailles, they were the root of all evil from within and without. The Jews were the universal scapegoats; always at hand and exceedingly useful. The position of the British in India is not so very different. In her role of scapegoat, Britain is held responsible for illiteracy, disunity, religious fanaticism, hunger and drought.

"Quit India" is a better proposition than *Judas Verrecke*, because world opinion in principle was opposed to anti-semitism, whereas the outside world, including the British and their government, is in complete agreement with the Indians. It has even become necessary for the informed Indians to keep the real state of British opinion from the less enlightened masses. Otherwise there would be no one to blame and nothing to shout about.

Parrot cries beget parrot cries; "Quit India" invariably provokes that singularly futile question "Is India ready for self-government?" Was Germany ready? Is Greece ready? Is China ready? Ask any soldier who has been there about China. The Chinese have had a civil war for almost ten years; famine, disease, corruption and illiteracy are still part and parcel of life in China; but that does not constitute an argument in favour of their being ruled by anyone other than themselves. The Indians want to rule



India and that is all there is to it. At this stage of world development, no one has the right to prevent them. That there may be civil war when we get out is possible, even probable; but that is no justification for the continuance of British rule in India. Every year at least a million Indians die of malnutrition and avoidable diseases. A civil war, or at least the serious threat of it, might be necessary; it may be the only way in which the Hindu-Muslim question can be resolved. The immeasurable benefits and progress that a settlement would bring to the country as a whole would justify almost any sacrifice. England and Scotland, or the Royalists and Roundheads, might still be bickering if France had occupied England and seen to it that they did not come to blows. India must be allowed to develop and it is not for us to sit there and harp on the possible dangers of the process.

"Quit India" sticks out a mile from the rest of the political scene, because it is the common denominator without which the widely divergent parties would not even be on speaking terms. Where their new focal point is coming from, once this slogan has become obsolete and England really has quit, is a problem to which I have never been able to find a satisfactory answer.

Much has been written about the parties and their leaders. I had no access to the leaders (I don't count standing within five yards of Mr. Gandhi when he took a prayer meeting at Marbeleshwar) and no time to read any books on the subject. But I did read the papers and spent as much time as possible talking to people of all shades of opinion. There is nothing the educated Indians like better than discussing politics; this gives them an excuse to indulge in their favourite pastime: Blaming Britain. They do this with tremendous gusto and quite charmingly, for they are never in the least personal and never offensive. Having made it quite clear that you are different, the



exception that proves the rule in fact, they get down to describing their sufferings, past and present, under the cruel British yoke.

The uneducated Indians, like the bearers, shopkeepers and delivery-men, need a good deal of coaxing. They are afraid to talk openly as they do not like the idea of annoying you. But it is possible to make friends and then, rather diffidently, they will tell you what they think. They honestly believe that within a year of the end of the British Raj they will all be a great deal better off. The property of the Sahibs will be distributed amongst them and so the poor Indians will be very much richer. "Quit India" is therefore a good thing. The religious problem (these are the only two issues with which they concern themselves) is, they admit, not such a good thing. When I asked our Mohammedan bearer, who was really very bright and could read and write in Urdu and English, what he thought of Gandhi and Congress ruling India he said: "But, Sahib, this will never work because of the cow." "What cow?" I said. "They worship the cow," he laughed, "we Moslems worship a god. We would never allow ourselves to be ruled by a people whose god is a cow."

A good deal more complicated in their outlook were the two Communist girls I once had tea with. Their hair rioted over their shoulders, their eyes were burning coals, and out of their joint mouth came a two-edged Marxian sword. Their arguments showed off their prodigious memories to great advantage. Apparently there was not a single book denouncing British Imperialism that they did not know by heart. They had ceased to be women and become gramophone records. Reluctantly I found myself agreeing with the Indian friend who introduced us, that in their case at least it might have been better not to educate them. But I was wrong, for those two girls were doing a really useful job teaching in an elementary school. These intolerant red



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ies were not typical, for with most of my Indian friends and acquaintances it was possible to discuss things quite rationally.

The trouble with the Hindu's approach to politics is that it is largely negative, apart from his blind love and fervent admiration for Mr. Gandhi. They start off by blaming Britain (of course) and the orthodox Hindus and the Parsees and the princes and the rich industrialists and the landowners. Then they go on to deplore the caste system, the illiteracy of the masses and primitive agricultural methods. Everything they say is logical and well reasoned, but there is nothing remotely constructive about it. They never put forward any definite suggestions; it all hinges rather vaguely on the dissolution of the British Raj. Once that is accomplished, everything will be different and all their problems will solve themselves. India will rise from her long sleep and begin enthusiastically to toil and build. For this, they admit, they will need our trade and our engineers; we can stay on if we like, they don't mind, as long as we are no longer the rulers. For how (and off they go again) is it possible for a people to develop when ground under the heel of a foreign master who does not understand their soul?

The Muslims, too, blame the British for a lot of things; but most of all for co-operating with the Hindus who are really the prime offenders. This is the reason for the present state of the country. And that brings them to Congress and Gandhi. What can you expect from this wishy-washy religion and from these feeble political methods? If it were not for the British, India would still be ruled by the Mohammedans who by now would have absorbed the Hindus. All the Mohammedans one talks to are convinced of two things, (a) that they are the rightful rulers of India, and (b) that it is no use their even trying to co-operate with the usurping Hindus because if they do they will always be cheated.



They claim that wherever the Congress administration has been in power the Mohammedans were never given a chance. And they cite instances of corrupt Congress officials feathering their nests and giving jobs to their relatives. That these practices were exposed and openly condemned by the Congress party itself, does not weigh with the Muslims at all. The fact that they happened provides them with a handy peg on which to hang their grievances. Pakistan is what India needs. Pakistan will solve everything. When asked to explain how, they are not very specific but take refuge behind Mr. Ali Jinnah, saying that he will know what to do "when the time comes."

Most of the Mohammedans I have talked to, think that a show-down is inevitable and the idea does not really worry them. Gandhi and the Hindus are weaklings, physically and mentally, and would not stand a chance if it came to an open fight. I was assured by my Muslim acquaintances that the British can stay on as long as they like, as individuals. The Mohammedans have a great respect for the British Army and our ability to keep order and get things done. They, like the Hindus, know that they will need our help for a long time yet.

The Muslim League, on the face of it, appears to be much the most efficient party machine. One very seldom hears of differences within the ranks, and speeches and actions are consistent. The platform is a straightforward issue: just Pakistan and Independence for the Mohammedans. Mr. Jinnah's leadership is absolute; there is no doubt that this brilliant lawyer is also an adroit politician. But the inflexible purpose of the League, which admits of no compromise and no tolerance, seems to me to constitute a real menace to the development of India. As long as their millions of followers remain convinced that they are India's Master Race by virtue of their faith—the faith which it is their duty to spread by political methods and, if necessary,



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by force—the Mohammedan minority is bound to remain an entirely separate people. They will never be able to merge with the Hindu majority and it is doubtful if they will even be able to live side by side with them. If Pakistan were achieved, the problem of vast Hindu minorities would arise. And in Congress India there would obviously be Muslim minorities. India as a whole would gain nothing except another large-scale headache, while the Hindu and Mohammedan minorities would be as helpless and unguarded pawns on the wrong side of a chessboard. Hindus, and Moslems as well, in Congress have frequently referred to the demand for Pakistan as treason to the peoples of India. In that it has prevented India from gaining her independence, I do not really see what else it could be called.

I have not met many members of the Hindu Mahasabha, for they are mostly the very orthodox Hindus who do not mix much with Europeans. They are largely concerned with the furtherance of their religious customs and creed. They are also opposed to progress in general and anything in the nature of western influence. This most reactionary of all the parties is small, but has a powerful backing of many Brahmins and big landowners.

The Communist party is also comparatively small, but it controls such trades unions as exist. Its members are so much more active and practical than those of any other party that their effect on Indian life is out of all proportion to their actual numbers. Go to any town and you will see them organising strikes for better conditions, seeing to the fair distribution of clothing and food whenever there is a shortage or famine, holding meetings, teaching the ignorant and spreading the word. Most of their leaders are young intellectuals and many of them are rich. The saying goes that you have to be rich to be a Communist in India. They are not particularly anti-British, less so than any other party. And just because they fail to harp on this all the



... preferring to concentrate on more immediate and far more complex problems, their appeal to the masses in general is very slight. Their Marxist doctrines, and preachings against capitalism, religion and the caste system, go clean over the heads of the ordinary coolie and farmer. For this reason alone, apart from the strong opposition they have aroused in every other political faction in India, it does not look as if the Communists have a chance.

Personally I believe the Congress party to be the most suitable of any. It has no religious or racial prejudices and it represents the majority of the people. The best proof of its vitality is that it has now outgrown the spinning-wheel theory of its leader, Mr. Gandhi. But as long as this very great man is still alive, there is little that the more progressive elements in the party can do. Gandhi's hold on the imagination of the people is complete : their feeling towards him is mystical and typically Indian. For them, he is more than the personification of leadership ; he fulfils the innermost need of the Indian soul. But once he dies or hands over his command, there are those who are ready and waiting to go on from where he leaves off. There is Pandit Jawarhalal Nehru, who realises the importance of industrialisation and wholesale reform in all spheres, and there are many big industrialists and Parsees who want to see their country prosper and expand through capitalism. The Congress party is the only political organisation in India which appears to be sufficiently flexible to combine prosperity with democracy. On the whole it looks like the best bet.

To many people, the idea of the Congress is anathema. Their siding with the Japanese, or at least refusing to resist them, is something that those who have not been in India cannot understand. I do not think that the party's attitude can even be called treason much less held against them indefinitely. Their decision was completely consistent



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with their dislike of the British Raj, coupled with the fact that the Cripps mission had failed miserably, and with their then quite logical belief that Britain had no hope of surviving her struggle with the Axis. Why the armchair critics of Congress should assume that they ought to have possessed prophetic Churchillian insight as to the outcome of the war is hard to say. What the Indians thought was only the result of what they saw.

As the Japanese approached, the refugees from Singapore, Malaya and Burma came pouring into India with tales of the utter disorganisation of all British resistance. Everyone knew that even before the Japs had arrived, the British administration and defence organisation had fallen into complete chaos. Calcutta, the nearest large town to what at any moment was likely to become the front, had already been bombed, was completely unprepared and, to all intents and purposes, undefended. The best Indian divisions were in North Africa and the available planes and ack-ack guns could almost be counted on the fingers of both hands. If the Japanese had a mind to, they would come in anyway and Congress was pledged to non-violence against whoever came into or was already in their country. It should be remembered that there was a large faction in the party who, under Nehru, opposed this policy. At that time he and Gandhi, the two greatest men in India, were farther apart than they had ever been before or were ever likely to be again. All the Indians to whom I spoke were emphatic that the Japanese would have been a hundred times worse than the British. I do not think that they said this merely because the Japs were then on the point of being beaten; if they had thought otherwise it would have given them great pleasure to say so.

The question "Is India ready for self-government?" is a stupid one to which the answer can only be "Yes, obviously." But the answer to the question "Is India



ready for Socialism?" is far less obvious and therefore a good deal more interesting. It seems to me that Socialism, as we know it today, cannot be arrived at all in one piece. It has to evolve by slow stages. Quick results and short-cuts can only be achieved by dictatorship. The average Indian is, above all, an individualist. He is not going to be capable of absorbing Socialism until he has a social conscience and a sense of social responsibility with which to absorb it. He will gradually develop these as he turns from what he is now into an educated worker. He will have the opportunity to become an educated worker as the country is developed and industrialised by capital and private enterprise. This, after all, was the way that Englishmen arrived at their present-day Socialism, and when assessing India's political problems from a distance, they frequently seem to forget what a very gradual process it was. Your English idealist does not realise that as yet only the wealthy Indians are educated. Their knowledge is still a privilege, a Divine Right, to be revelled in for its own sake and turned to personal gain. When education ceases to be a high-priced commodity and becomes a public utility, India will be able to begin to think along the right lines; but until that happens she will not and cannot be ready for Socialism.

Where there is wholesale ignorance, right thinking cannot make much progress. In spite of this, there are signs that things are beginning to move at last. Nothing very sensational has happened as yet, but in some industrial areas and in a few of the big towns there have been strikes. One of the most significant and heartening was the rickshaw strike in Calcutta. Thousands of coolies, who are completely uneducated and come from all parts of Bengal, suddenly downed shafts at a given signal. They stayed out for almost a week, which must have meant near starvation for many of them and their families. But they won their case against the rich Babus who hire out the rickshaws to them and whose



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forces had been steadily mounting until the collective action of the coolies put a stop to this profiteering. And one day the taxi drivers—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike—vanished from the streets. They struck because two of their comrades had been murdered and robbed by American soldiers. They refused to return until the Army authorities had taken appropriate steps to protect them and prevent a repetition of this kind of incident. Then the tram drivers and conductors struck for higher wages, and won. So did the underpaid printers, shoemakers and other artisans.

There is no doubt that the idea of co-operation is beginning to dawn on the workers in the big cities ; but at present that is as far as it has gone. The vast majority of the people still labours unconsciously under appallingly cruel conditions. India may have stirred in her sleep, but the world must be prepared to wait sometime before she is fully awake.



BACKWARD GLANCE

I WAS sitting in the crowded bomb bay of a Liberator, three days away from the West, from my civilisation, my home and my new life. I was thinking about the past fourteen months ; trying to summarise them, to pin them down. If I wanted to tell my friends what I thought and what my impressions were, it was necessary that I should first be able to tell myself. But I very soon found that I was quite unable to visualise any one representative picture or even to formulate one candid opinion. In my mind, the whole thing kept breaking up into a series of pictures and patterns, like a kaleidoscope. I could not stick to one opinion ; there were dozens—as many opinions as pictures. The only thing that was constant now was my reluctance to criticise. . . the Indians or the British Raj. Before I arrived, there had seemed to be no case for the latter, but at that time I was ignorant of the inconceivable difficulties that the European has to overcome in the execution of his job.

As to whether he should or should not be in India, is for his government to decide. But as he is here, he can only try and do his duty to the best of his ability. What he considers to be his duty is dictated by his sense of values which is the product of his civilisation. Out here, his civilisation is uneasily imposed upon another entirely different one. The two don't understand each other ; they have few, if any, points of contact. The white man has to try and co-operate with the native across a yawning gulf. It is not to be wondered at that he frequently raises his voice in an effort to make himself heard.



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Almost all the British Civil Servants I met in India were genuine, sincere and deeply interested in their jobs. They were excellent men with the most thorough and detailed training of many years behind them; entirely different from what I had imagined they would be like before I met them. I was surprised that they were not longing to go back and work in England, like almost everyone else I met out there. This was not due to the fact that their pay was higher and their life more leisurely, for with their qualifications they could have held exceedingly well-paid positions back home. From what I saw of them, I am convinced that the Indian Civil Servant is the most selfless servant that Britain has ever had.

I had begun to understand and sympathise with the problems of the white man in India soon after my arrival, when I reached the phase that everyone goes through of thinking of the Indians as Wogs. When this happens, all your preconceived ideas seem to go sour on you and then melt away in the hot sun; you see the Indians as a lot of hopeless degenerates and the Soul of India as backsheesh. The feeling is entirely involuntary. It is like a violent allergy; your imagination suddenly revolts, it swells, it comes out in spots, it vomits. This being allergic to everything Indian can go on indefinitely unless one desensitizes oneself with reason. Reason and experience gradually teach one that every time one passes a judgment there is always a case for the defence. One begins to see that no one from the West however informed or expert, is really entitled to accuse, much less to pass judgment. And yet this is what everyone from the West is bound to find themselves doing. I had done it again and again. India had made an impact on me, an impact so strong that, try as I would, it was impossible to remain objective. My own comparative standards were handy, and repeatedly and wrongly I had measured the Indian scene against them.



common with thousands of other soldiers from Europe and America, I had failed to take into consideration: India's past, India's climate and India's values. Out of which arises India's behaviour and its whole make-up.

India's past: About a thousand years ago the Moguls invaded from the north and began to work their way south, conquering more and more states and gradually enveloping nearly the whole country. But there was never an outcome, a solution to this invasion. The Mohammedans did not achieve a complete conquest; they did not merge with the Hindus, nor did the native states ever unite in an organised defence. Any development that might have taken place was suddenly arrested by the arrival of the British who put a stop to the wars and wanderings of the Indian people. A *status quo* was enforced and India was pulled up short in the middle of her greatest transition. Religions, people and states remained separated and disunited, just as we found them almost two hundred years ago. These two hundred years would no doubt have meant a long succession of civil wars; more hunger, more disease, more suffering than there has been under the British rule. But it might also have meant that by now India would have solved her own problems. She might easily have become an entirely Mohammedan nation—for that religion was spreading fast when we arrived—or perhaps several Indian states of different faith and government. Anything might have happened; it might have been better, it might have been worse. But the fact remains that our coming acted like a frost and stunted her natural growth. We caught the Indian civilisation at its lowest cultural ebb and nipped it in the bud. And now it lags even farther behind our own than when we first came into contact with it.

India's climate: The very hot climate naturally tends to make people apathetic and lazy; energy just sweats itself away. Any European who has lived through an Indian



...mer can vouch for that. Viscount Valentia refers to the "indolence which is natural" to the Indians. Indolence is natural to the people of every tropical country. They can live without houses, without heating or clothes and, therefore, as near as makes no odds, without work. Their soil is mostly poor, dry and unrewarding, and farming methods are primitive. They eat too little, their physique is bad and they can neither resist disease nor stand up to any great strain. Their average expectation of life is not much more than twenty-five years.

India's values : The mind is what matters above everything else, or for those whose mind is unawakened, the spirit. Health, housing, food, child welfare, all physical welfare in fact, is of secondary importance. Their physical suffering is not as significant and horrifying to them as it is to us ; it does not matter. They are not sensitive about it. They can bear it, see it and inflict it. This point of view is completely consistent and applies as much to their own children as it does to the pie dogs. So much that appalls the outsider with a western sense of smell and the western revulsion from visible deformity and suffering, has not the same meaning for the Indian. The white man goes to India and is revolted by the cruelty, filth and obscenity ; the Indian who goes to Europe is disgusted by our materialism, crudeness and lack of spirituality. Each, according to his own scale of values, is right. Each, according to the other's scale of values, is wrong. . . . Neither is any better for passing judgment on the other, but each could learn from the other. The Indian would be happier with a healthier and a more practical way of life, and we should be happier with some of his disregard for those pleasures and amenities which never seem to satisfy us anyway.

Which all boils down, or rather refuses to boil down, to my being unable to state any definite opinion about India without lacing it with a lot of other opinions about the



I was never going to be able to make a statement without qualifying it. In other words, I was going to be terribly long-winded and infuriatingly inconclusive. From now on, I was going to be the wet blanket at any Indian discussion with my eternal "yes, but. . . ." I was going to find myself challenging the authority of those who claimed to be experts, disillusioning the idealists and, shame to end shames, sometimes having to agree with the Blimps. This was an awful thought, worse than the fear that the pilot of the plane might forget himself, pull the lever, open the bomb doors and release a stick of passengers on the Holy Land over which we were now passing.

The twilight in the bomb bay eventually gave way to the frosty darkness of an English February night, an unheated Nissen hut and deep sleep. Next morning we had to break the ice on a static water tank before we could fill some buckets to wash. Sitting in the train on the springy third-class seats and breathing the rich, sulphuric third-class fug, we saw the sun coming up through the Cambridgeshire mists. Glued to the window, we watched the deep, sticky, even furrows of the ploughland, the snug villages, the contented well-fed cattle and, above all, the fresh soaked green of the countryside. Green meant home to us; it evoked everything that we loved. This was the green that all the English poets had sung about; the erudite Indians could quote their verses so much better than I could. . . . They could quote the verses, but I had the green.

Everything was exactly the same. This was strange, because I have never been away for any length of time before without on my return looking at the English countryside and life through slightly different eyes. Something of the place I have come from remains with me and does not immediately disappear, and I find myself making comparisons, and standing aside for a little while, almost like a visitor. But this time, after fourteen months at the other



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of the world, there was no feeling of strangeness ;
my focus had not altered by a hair's breadth. England
was my England, and India was altogether too far away,
too big and too different to compare with anything I had
ever known.

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